

THE ANGLO-SAXON CHANCERY

The History, Language and
Production of Anglo-Saxon
Charters from Alfred
to Edgar

BEN SNOOK

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THE ANGLO-SAXON CHANCERY

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THE ANGLO-SAXON CHANCERY

The History, Language and Production of
Anglo-Saxon Charters from Alfred to Edgar

Ben Snook

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Dans les pays où l'administration publique est déjà puissante, il naît peu d'idées, de désirs, de douleurs, il se recontre peu d'intérêts et de passions qui ne viennent tôt ou tard se montrer à nu devant elle. En visitant ses archives on n'acquiert pas seulement une notion très-exacte de ses procédés, le pays tout entier s'y révèle.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la Révolution*
(Paris, 1856), p. viii

In countries where public administration is already strong, few ideas, needs, grievances, few interests or enthusiasms fail sooner or later to come to its notice. By examining its archives, not only does one gain a precise idea of its public procedures but the entire country is on display.

Gerald Bevan and Hugh Brogan, eds. and trans.,
*Alexis de Tocqueville: The Ancien Régime
and the Revolution* (London, 2008), p. 9

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Acknowledgements

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I probably did not fully appreciate quite how extraordinary the ASNaC Department was until I left Cambridge. Despite its occasional eccentricities, it nevertheless fostered an effervescent spirit of scholarship, discussion and learning which was as intense as it was electrifying. New and exciting ideas were as likely to be exchanged, explored and exploded during morning coffee (or in the pub on a Friday night) as they were during seminars and lectures. A strikingly egalitarian atmosphere pervaded the department, within whose walls undergraduates, postgraduates, postdoctoral researchers and lecturing staff (not to mention the colourful crowd of emeritus professors, visiting scholars and other assorted camp followers who were always passing through) could talk and think together, swapping hypotheses, comparing notes from their respective fields, telling stories and arguing over the coveted Erik Bloodaxe mug at coffee time. The unique, interdisciplinary approach to the Middle Ages which is at the heart of ASNaC's ethos underpins every aspect of my research (and is evident on almost every page of this book). I therefore owe a considerable debt to those who taught me there: Haki Antonsson, who took me through my initial set of supervisions in Scandinavian history during my first weeks as an undergraduate; Richard Dance, who tolerated my total and persistent inability to distinguish between a strong and a weak verb in weekly Old English classes with surprising good humour; and David Dumville, without whose inspirational teaching, and willingness to admit to the university a somewhat dishevelled applicant from south-east Essex with a decidedly unremarkable set of GCSEs, none of this would be possible. Simon Keynes, whose fault it was that I got into charters in the first place, deserves a mention as well. Now and again, when I was a postgraduate, he would pass me in a corridor and, whilst disappearing off into the distance,

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been in London, it has seemed as though the existence of some of these libraries has been almost constantly under threat for one reason or another; yet, the benefits of having access to such up-to-date and wide-ranging book collections, the majority of which are available on open shelving, are so numerous that they are impossible to list. These libraries, and the excellent people who staff them, simply must prevail.

My greatest debt of gratitude, though, is to my wife, Kate (who has come to describe herself as a 'history widow' whilst I have been writing this), to my parents, John and Deborah, and to my grandparents. It is to them that I affectionately dedicate this book, as well as to a more distant ancestor, John Mitchell Kemble, who would, I hope, have approved.

Abbreviations

<i>Aldhelmi opera</i>	Rudolf Ehwald, ed., <i>Aldhelmi opera</i> , MGH Auct. antiq. 15 (Berlin, 1919)
ALL	Michael Lapidge, <i>Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066</i> (London, 1993)
ASC	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
BACS	British Academy Charters Series
BCS	Walter de Gray Birch, ed., <i>Cartularium saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History</i> , 3 vols (London, 1885–95)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
ECWM	Herbert P. R. Finberg, ed., <i>The Early Charters of the West Midlands</i> (Leicester, 1961)
EHD	Dorothy Whitelock, ed. and trans., <i>English Historical Documents I: 500–1042</i> (London, 1979)
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
HE	Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i> , ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969)
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
JML	<i>Journal of Medieval Latin</i>
Keynes, Diplomas	Simon Keynes, <i>The Diplomas of Æthelred ‘the Unready’ 978–1016. A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence</i> (Cambridge, 1980)
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PASE	<i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i> (www.pase.ac.uk)
Prisca Munimenta	<i>Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender</i> , ed. Felicity Ranger (London, 1973)
S	Sawyer number, according to Peter H. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London, 1968)
SLH	Scriptores Latini Hiberniae
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>

Charters and their later editions

Many of the texts of the Anglo-Saxon charters used in this study are now available in modern editions as part of the British Academy Anglo-Saxon Charters Series (BACS). The texts quoted here have been drawn from a BACS edition wherever possible. References are abbreviated to the surname of the editor and the name of the archive (e.g., Kelly, *Peterborough*). However, at the time of writing, several important archives (most notably Worcester and Old Minster, Winchester) await publication. Where a charter from one of these archives has been quoted, therefore, the text has been drawn primarily from Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *Cartularium saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History*, 3 vols (London, 1885–95). To bring the text into line with the BACS editions and in order to obtain the best reading, Birch's text has been compared with John Mitchell Kemble, ed., *Codex diplomaticus aevi saxonici*, 6 vols (London, 1839–48) wherever possible and has been repunctuated.

BACS editions alphabetically by archive

- Abingdon Susan Kelly, ed., *The Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 7–8, 2 vols (Oxford, 2000–1)
- Bath and Wells Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Bath and Wells*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 13 (Oxford, 2007)
- Burton Peter Sawyer, ed., *Charters of Burton Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 2 (Oxford, 1979)
- Canterbury, Christ Church Nicholas Brooks and Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 17–18, 2 vols (Oxford, 2013)
- Canterbury, St Augustine's (and Minster-in-Thamet) Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, and Minster-in-Thamet*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 4 (Oxford, 1995)
- Glastonbury Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Glastonbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 15 (Oxford, 2012)
- Malmesbury Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 11 (Oxford, 2005)
- Peterborough Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Peterborough*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 14 (Oxford, 2009)
- Rochester Alistair Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 1 (Oxford 1973)
- Selsey Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Selsey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 6 (Oxford, 1998)
- Shaftesbury Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 5 (Oxford, 1996)

Abbreviations

- Sherborne Mary O'Donovan, ed., *Charters of Sherborne*,
Anglo-Saxon Charters 3 (Oxford, 1988)
- St Albans Julia Crick, ed., *Charters of St Albans*, Anglo-Saxon
Charters 12 (Oxford, 2007)
- St Paul's Susan Kelly, ed., *Charters of St Paul's, London*, Anglo-Saxon
Charters 10 (Oxford, 2004)
- Winchester, New Minster Sean Miller, ed., *Charters of the New
Minster, Winchester*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 9 (Oxford 2001)
- York (and other northern houses) David Woodman, ed., *Charters of
Northern Houses*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 16 (Oxford, 2012)

Timeline of Key Events between the Accession of Alfred and the Death of Edgar

- 871 Alfred becomes King of the West Saxons.
- 878 Alfred defeats the Vikings at Edington, leading to the treaty of Wedmore, by which he establishes control of the land south of the Thames. This leads to an atmosphere of comparative security in the 880s and 890s, which enables Alfred to initiate a programme of wide-ranging cultural and educational reforms.
- 883 Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, marries Æthelred of Mercia.
- 886 Alfred reoccupies the important trading centre of London, and sets about rebuilding and expanding it.
- 899 Alfred dies, and is succeeded by his son, Edward 'the Elder'. Æthelwold, Edward's cousin, rebels.
- 902 The rebellion of Æthelwold is finally ended with his defeat and death at the Battle of Holme.
- 911 Ealdorman Æthelred dies, leaving Æthelflæd as *de facto* ruler of Mercia. During the following seven years, the Danes in the Midlands and East Anglia are defeated in a series of campaigns led by Æthelflæd and Edward, and these areas are brought under Anglo-Saxon control.
- 918 Æthelflæd dies, leaving her daughter, Ælfwynn, in control of Mercia. Ælfwynn is swiftly deposed by Edward and dispatched to a nunnery. This effectively gives Edward direct control of both Wessex and Mercia.
- 920 Edward initiates a campaign in the north, receiving the submission of the Northumbrians, Scots and Strathclyde Britons (although he probably does not exercise much, if any, direct authority north of the Humber).
- 924 Edward dies. He is succeeded in Mercia by his son, Æthelstan. Æthelstan's half-brother, Ælfweard becomes king in Wessex but dies three weeks later. Æthelstan is crowned the following year.
- 927 Æthelstan conquers York, the last remaining Viking-ruled stronghold in England.
- 934 Æthelstan, accompanied by four Welsh kings, travels north, visiting the Community of St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street, and launches an invasion of Scotland.

Timeline

- 937 At the Battle of Brunanburh, Æthelstan defeats an alliance of Vikings and Scots.
- 939 Æthelstan dies. He is succeeded by his half-brother, Edmund. Early in his reign, Edmund loses control over Northumbria and northern Mercia following a Viking invasion led by Olaf Guthfrithsson.
- 942 Following Olaf's death, Edmund begins a campaign to reconquer northern Mercia and Northumbria.
- 946 Edmund is murdered at Pucklechurch. He is succeeded by his brother, Eadred, who at once asserts his rule over the north.
- 955 Eadred dies. He is succeeded by his brother, Eadwig (the eldest son of Edward 'the Elder').
- 956 In his efforts to build support amongst the Anglo-Saxon elite, Eadwig issues around sixty charters in a single year.
- 957 The kingdom is divided between Eadwig (who rules south of the Thames) and his brother, Edgar (who rules in Mercia and the north).
- 959 The death of Eadwig leads to the reunification of the kingdom under Edgar.
- 960 Dunstan becomes archbishop of Canterbury.
- 963 Æthelwold becomes bishop of Winchester.
- 975 Edgar dies and is succeeded by his son, Edward 'the Martyr'.

Introduction

A brief history of the land charter in England

The 'charters of the kings between Edward the Elder and Edward the Martyr', wrote Sir Frank Stenton in the middle of the 1950s, 'form a monotonous series'.¹ He continued: 'as illustrations of curial scholarship these charters are disappointing.'² His words bode very badly indeed for a book which takes as its subject the charters of the kings between Edward 'the Elder' and Edward 'the Martyr'. However, whilst Stenton got much right over the course of his long and distinguished career, when it came to tenth-century charters he may have been a little too quick to condemn; for the charters issued in the century between the accession of Alfred in 871 and the death of Edgar, his great-grandson, in 975, are some of the most challenging, obscure and fascinating documents of their type ever produced anywhere in early medieval Europe.

The purpose of a medieval charter³ was, in essence, to record where and when who gave what to whom, and who was there

¹ Frank Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford, 1955), p. 66.

² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³ Something should be said about the semantics of the word 'charter'. Traditionally, a distinction may be drawn between documents issued by the king (which are usually called diplomas), those issued by ecclesiastics or noblemen (often called charters) and other material issued by private individuals, including grants, wills, memoranda, etc. (sometimes called deeds): see Richard Sharpe, 'Charters, Deeds and Diplomats', in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Frank A. C. Mantello and Arthur G. Rigg (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 230–40; Harry Bresslau and Hans-Walter Klewitz, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*, 2 vols (Berlin and Leipzig, 1912–31); and Thomas Behrmann, 'Diplomatics', in *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia I: A–K*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz (London, 2004), pp. 297–8. Elsewhere, 'diploma' has been used to refer to documents issued by the king, whereas 'charter' has been used for everything else: see Simon Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 13, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Brian W. Schneider (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 17–184. However, for much of their history, the Anglo-Saxons seem not to have drawn a consistent distinction between these different kinds of documents in terms of how they were composed, stored and used; therefore, the word 'charter' has been used here to cover everything. See Ben Snook, 'Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Theodore', in *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language and Libraries in Early Medieval England, Proceedings of the Conference Held in Rochester in July 2010*, ed. Bruce O'Brien and Barbara Bombi (Turnhout, forthcoming 2015).

when it happened.⁴ Most charters recorded gifts of land and then, subsequently, came to serve as the deeds to that land. They were, however, surprisingly flexible documents which could also record gifts of money, goods, privileges, trading rights and almost anything else. Notwithstanding the necessary legal technicalities, medieval draftsmen tended to go about their business with the minimum of fuss. Straightforward and businesslike, the charters they wrote are historical bread-and-butter, the kind of document which allows historians to locate certain people in certain places at certain times before going on to deal with chronicles and histories, in the pages of which far more tantalising historical morsels are likely to be found than amongst the dry, narrative, pragmatic prose of the charter.

The diplomas of the Carolingians and then of the Capetians in France, and of the Ottonians in Germany, tended, with a few exceptions, to conform to this general stereotype. Mostly, they were straightforward records of transactions and gifts, produced under the direction of a chancellor,⁵ and carefully organised in smart, systematised archives. Of course, there were exceptions: time and geography led to the development of many local styles, procedures and formulae, some of which were grander and more ambitious than others. Largely, though, in their language, style and appearance, the charters that emerged from the courts of continental Europe in the early Middle Ages were mature and clean cut; everything, in other words, that a legal document should be. In contrast, the diplomatic tradition which flourished in England between the end of the seventh century and the Norman Conquest was a little eccentric. For if Anglo-Saxon charters were supposed to be simple, functional documents, nobody had thought to impress that upon the scribes charged with their production. At every stage of its existence, from S 8 (the earliest Anglo-Saxon charter to survive in its original form, dating from 679) to S 1163 (a writ of King Harold Godwinson to Bishop Giso of Wells which, at present, has the distinction of being the last extant document ever to have been issued by an Anglo-Saxon king), the Anglo-Saxon charter has

⁴ The role, purpose, audience of medieval charters, and the rituals with which they may or may not have been associated are discussed below, pp. 66–9. Good general introductions to medieval European charters are: Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Secular Administration' and Richard Sharp, 'Charters, Deeds and Diplomatics', in *Medieval Latin*, ed. Mantello and Rigg, pp. 195–229 and 230–40 respectively. See also Guy Halsall, 'The Sources and Their Interpretation', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. I: c.500–c.700*, ed. Paul Fouracre (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 71–4.

⁵ Who the *cancellarius* was, and what the title even meant, are complicated issues. While the *cancellarius*, who was usually a leading ecclesiastic, tended to be responsible for the production and sometimes the delivery of royal charters, the precise duties associated with the post were not consistent in continental Europe, particularly not in the earlier Middle Ages. See Benoît-Michel Tock, *Une chancellerie épiscopale au XIIe siècle: le cas d'Arras*, Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales: textes, études, congrès 12 (Louvain, 1991).

tormented its critics with its curious appearance, peculiar prose style and, perhaps most of all, by its frustrating habit of refusing to reveal conclusive evidence of the circumstances of its production.

From the very beginning, the Anglo-Saxon charter had ideas above its station. Charters were introduced into England in the seventh century, most probably by Theodore of Tarsus when he arrived from Rome to take over the vacant archbishopric of Canterbury in 668 (although there is an argument that they had been introduced by St Augustine seven decades before).⁶ Simple in style, they were, unlike their continental counterparts, written in a grand, uncial book script, which lent them the aspect of a high-grade manuscript, specifically of a gospel book.⁷ As time went on, diplomatic conventions began to change. The script in which Anglo-Saxon charters were written decayed, moving from the uncial and half uncial hands typical of the seventh and early eighth centuries towards a less imposing, more utilitarian, cursive style. Yet, as the standard of the script declined, the Latin in which Anglo-Saxon diplomas were composed evolved dramatically. Gradually, the Anglo-Saxon charter came to offer an opportunity to its more erudite authors to show off, with breath-taking results. The notoriously sophisticated Latin of Aldhelm (d. 709/10), abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, had an enormous influence on this process. Aldhelm's polished, ostentatious and immensely cultured Latin style had been a defining feature of Anglo-Latin literature from a very early date. At the beginning of the eighth century, authors such as Felix, Boniface and Tatwine, who were Aldhelm's rough contemporaries, all imitated his style in their own writing;⁸ at the beginning of the ninth, Alcuin made little attempt to hide his own enthusiasm for Aldhelm's elaborate Latin.⁹ Subsequently, Aldhelm became an established part of the Anglo-Saxon curriculum in more than one centre of learning. Particularly heavy glossing of his work in the tenth century, but also before that, suggests that it was the subject of intense study throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.¹⁰

⁶ For the latter view see Pierre Chaplais, 'Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine' in *Prisca Munimenta*, pp. 88–107. For the former, see Stenton, *Latin Charters*, p. 31; and *Anglo-Saxon England*, (3rd edn, Oxford, 1971), p. 141. See also Snook, 'Who Introduced Charters into England?' and Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 18–21.

⁷ On the development of documentary and administrative scripts on the continent, see Rosamund McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), especially ch. 3.

⁸ On Felix's style, see Gernot Wieland, 'Aures lectoris: Orality and Literacy in Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*', *JML* 7 (1997): 168–77; on the reception and imitation of Aldhelm's style more generally, see Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, CSASE 8 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 239–83.

⁹ Alcuin quoted or paraphrased Aldhelm quite frequently: see Peter Godman, ed., *The Kings, Bishops and Saints of York*, OMT (Oxford, 1982), pp. 143–4.

¹⁰ For precise discussions of the glossing of Aldhelm's work, see Ray Page, 'More Aldhelm Glosses from CCC 326', *English Studies* 56 (1975): 481–90; Philip Rusche, 'Dry-Point Glosses

On the face of it, then, it ought not to come as too much of a surprise to find that charter draftsmen, too, sought to imitate the style of Anglo-Saxon England's most influential author. Except that to quote or paraphrase Aldhelm's work in a charter, let alone to write original, diplomatic Latin in an Aldhelmian literary mode, with its obscure vocabulary and lengthy sentences, was completely incongruous. Charters were legal documents; they were supposed to be clear statements of legal fact, which could be produced in the event of a dispute and straightforwardly decoded. Filling them with poetic metaphors, obscure Graecisms and long, tortuous syntactical structures would seem, on the face of it, to contradict the very purpose of the charter. Indeed, prior to the mid-ninth century, Anglo-Saxon charters and Anglo-Latin literature were two distinctive genres which had little in common. Charter prose tended to be legalistic, formulaic and technical, in contrast to the much more exuberant Latin written by the likes of Alcuin or Boniface. However, in the ninth century, these two ways of writing began to coalesce.¹¹ For some reason, Anglo-Saxon draftsmen began to incorporate quotations from Aldhelm's work into their charters, not only paraphrasing him but going so far as to imitate his grand, literary style explicitly in their own prose. By the tenth century, the Anglo-Saxon charter had become a virtually bipartite document. On the one hand, those sections which enabled the charter to function as a legal and political statement – namely the dispositive section, boundary clause, dating clause and royal style – varied relatively little from one document to the next. Pithily, they recorded when, and sometimes where, the charter was composed, detailed the nature of the transaction, and hyperbolised about the extent of the king's authority. The proem and sanction, however, became sandpits for the extravagant and playful imaginations of the draftsmen charged with their production. There are several examples of a single draftsman, apparently just for the sake of it, writing a different proem and sanction almost every time he drafted a charter, experimenting on each occasion with all kinds of obscure vocabulary and bizarre circumlocutions. While the Anglo-Saxon charter never lost its utility as a legal record, stylistically it became something very

to Aldhelm's *De laudibus virginitatis* in Beinecke 401', *ASE* 23 (1994): 195–213; Scott Gwara, 'A Record of Anglo-Saxon Pedagogy: Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Heahfridum* and its Gloss', *JML* 6 (1996): 84–134; 'Drypoint Glossing in a Tenth-Century Manuscript of Aldhelm's Prose Treatise on Virginity', *Traditio* 51 (1996): 99–145; and 'Further Old English Scratched Glosses and Merographs from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 326 (Aldhelm's *prosa de virginitate*)', *English Studies* 78 (1997): 201–36; and Gernot Wieland, 'Interpreting the Interpretation: The Polysemy of the Latin Gloss', *JML* 8 (1998): 59–7.

¹¹ Scott Thompson Smith made some interesting observations about such problems of genre in *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series (Toronto, 2012), pp. 18–19.

much more imposing and, as it did so, it deviated radically from the more conventional, legal style of its continental counterparts.

The origins of this movement lay in Mercia. On Christmas Day 840, a charter, S 193 (which is reproduced in Appendix I), was written at Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire. It was composed in a highly sophisticated style of Latin that had not been written with such accomplishment in England for the better part of a century. At first sight, such a style seems wholly unsuited to its diplomatic context. Obscure vocabulary and words derived ultimately from Greek and Hebrew (for instance: *agios* and *Zabaoth*) were combined with complex alliterating patterns (*sagax sophista, catholica et baptismum Christi in Britannia, firmiterque firmata*), a line of verse (*non semper licet gaudere fugit hora qua iocemur*), and a series of hyperbolic set pieces (*valde bene operatum ac faleratum in magno pretio*) to create a masterpiece of Anglo-Latin literature that was clearly intended to appeal to its audience's literary appetites. The charter still performed its essential role, recording a transaction between Abbot Eanmund of Breedon and King Beorhtwulf of the Mercians, but it did so in a truly remarkable way. The same traits that made S 193 so remarkable can also be seen in its twin, S 197, which was composed at Breedon in 848 and subsequently preserved at Peterborough; two charters from Worcester, S 217 and S 346 (written in 887 and 889 respectively; S 346 is reproduced in Appendix II), demonstrate comparable characteristics, as do a number of other Mercian documents from the 800s, the earliest of which date back to the beginning of that century.¹²

In the second quarter of the tenth century, such Mercian flamboyance mingled with West Saxon administrative efficiency in the royal writing office of King Æthelstan and his successors. The result was some of the grandest, most eloquent, and most baffling Latin prose ever written in pre-Conquest England. To the base stock of Aldhelmisms were added, throughout the tenth century, an ever-greater sprinkling of neologisms, Graecisms and archaisms, the likes of which would surely have delighted (and perhaps confounded) even the great Aldhelm himself. Such a style demands comparison with the 'hermeneutic' style of Latin associated with the monastic reformers in the middle of the tenth century. The term 'hermeneutic' (the name deriving from *hermeneumata*, the Greek-Latin glossaries from which many of the obscure Graecisms which characterised the style were presumably drawn) seems first to have been used to describe this

¹² See below, pp. 33–6. I have discussed these charters, and the factors which may have compelled their draftsmen to adopt such a style, in more detail elsewhere: see Ben Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings: Advanced Latinity in Four Mercian Charters of the Ninth Century', *Mediaevistik: Internationale Zeitschrift für Interdisziplinäre Mittelalterforschung* 26 (2013): 111–47. See also Kelly, *Peterborough*, p. 211.

way of writing Anglo-Latin by Alistair Campbell: 'two traditions of Latinity were established' he wrote, referring to Bede and Aldhelm respectively, 'distinguished as the Classical and the Hermeneutic'.¹³ In the mid-1970s, Michael Lapidge became the first scholar to try to tame the 'hermeneutic' style, to consider its origins, and to explore its implications for Anglo-Saxon cultural history.¹⁴ Lapidge described a Latin style that was baroque in its intricate complexity, that was ludicrously complicated to unravel, and that was intimately bound up with the feverish atmosphere of monastic reform that prevailed in England in the 960s and 970s. Since Lapidge wrote his article, the term has taken something of a battering by scholars who clearly do not like it, but also have not seen fit to suggest anything better. In 1980, the great Frank Barlow playfully described it as 'a mystery, hermetic, bizarre, confined to the elite, *obscuram per obscurius*, a don's delight'.¹⁵ More recently, Julia Barrow dismissed it as a term used 'incorrectly but expressively' for 'the florid and highly Graecized Latin favoured by Aldhelm and many other early medieval authors'.¹⁶

Definition is clearly a problem, not least because of the muddled use of the term 'hermeneutic' itself. For Lapidge, 'hermeneutic' Latin was the style practised in the tenth century, specifically by the monastic reformers. For others, such as Barrow, it was a convenient catch-all, which appeared to refer to Aldhelm, the tenth-century reformers and almost anybody else in between whose Latin came across as being obscure. The Latin written by Aldhelm was certainly very challenging and relied, to an extent, on the use of obscure Graecisms and archaisms. However, the Latin that was written by the monastic reformers in the tenth century clearly represented an evolution of this style. Whilst undoubtedly inspired by Aldhelm, they incorporated contemporary, continental influences into their work, writing Latin in which the use of archaic, obscure and Greek-derived vocabulary was often rather gratuitous, as if intended to render the text almost untranslatable. The critic might go so far as to suggest that the tenth-century 'hermeneutic' style lacked something of the elegance and poise of Aldhelm's prose.

This is where charters come in, for they are the 'missing link' between the Aldhelmian style that had long been a characteristic of Anglo-Latin, and the 'hermeneutic' Latin of the 960s. The charters of the 800s and early 900s not only record the erosion of the barrier between

¹³ Alistair Campbell, ed. and trans., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), p. xiv.

¹⁴ Michael Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature', in *ALL*, pp. 105–50. First published in *ASE* 4 (1975): 67–111.

¹⁵ Frank Barlow, 'The English Background', in *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St Boniface and the Church at Crediton*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Exeter, 1980), pp. 11–30, at p. 24.

¹⁶ Julia S. Barrow, 'The Chronology of Forgery Production at Worcester from c. 1000 to the Early Twelfth Century', in *St Wulfstan and His World*, Studies in Early Medieval Britain, ed. Julia S. Barrow and Nicholas Brooks (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 105–22, at p. 109.

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diplomatic and literary prose, which would become fundamental to the development of Anglo-Latin over the course of the tenth century, but also (just as Michael Lapidge predicted they would)¹⁷ provide almost annual snapshots of this gradual movement from 'classical' Aldhelmian Latin towards the more convoluted 'hermeneutic' style. As such, the implications of these documents for the understanding of Anglo-Saxon cultural history are profound. Perhaps a more pressing question, though, is why the barriers between diplomatic and literary Latin degraded in the way they did in Anglo-Saxon England.

Methodological principles

It would seem obvious, on being presented with a style as ostentatious and as incongruous as that of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters, to ask questions of its origins, its mechanics, its audience and its broader cultural impact. However, when it comes to charters, such an approach is far from conventional. In an influential review article published in 2005, David Bates, writing about charter scholarship generally, posed the question: 'do we think about form, content, production and language in relation to purpose, audience and context as much as we should?'¹⁸ His implicit conclusion was that, in 2005, we did not. Yet, to ignore the extent to which the nature of its purpose, audience and context drove developments in the form and appearance of the charter in England would be to miss the point entirely. By the 930s, Anglo-Saxon charters had become explosive statements of the learnedness of the court and, at the same time, propaganda-laden assertions of royal authority, their language bursting with Graecisms, neologisms and archaisms fit to challenge even the most adept Latinist. Consistently, these documents were at the cutting edge of Anglo-Saxon literary culture; in their script and their language they set trends and informed the literate population in no uncertain terms of the scholarly supremacy of the royal court. The chief purposes of the present study, then, will be to examine the literary dimensions of these documents, to present tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters as works of Anglo-Latin literature, and, by examining the intellectual hinterlands of their writers, to elevate those writers from being mere anonymous draftsmen to being authors in their own right. Yet, at the heart of it all remains the fundamental question on which the argument

¹⁷ Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style', p. 140: 'an attempt to trace the appearance and movements of the more unusual hermeneutic words might possibly supplement the diplomatic study of Anglo-Saxon charters.'

¹⁸ David Bates, 'Charters and Historians of Britain and Ireland: Problems and Possibilities', in *Charters and Charter Scholarship in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Marie Therese Flanagan and Judith A. Green (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 1–14, at p. 2.

of every chapter will pivot: why? Why should legal documents, which had been written in perfectly straightforward Latin for two centuries, suddenly be transformed into such imposing works of literature? This kind of Latin did not just happen by accident. It would have required a substantial investment of time and effort on the part of a seriously learned draftsman. Who employed draftsmen like that, and why? Who designed the prose they wrote? And, perhaps most importantly of all, who was reading it?

Addressing these questions raises a series of important methodological issues. Initially, the inevitable question in the field of Anglo-Latin literature is one of sources. Marking out an author's literary heritage is essential in acquiring an impression of his training and outlook, and essential if one is going to obtain a window into his soul, to borrow a phrase. Only by surveying the intellectual landscape within which an author wrote can we understand how and why he produced the work he did. If Anglo-Saxon charter draftsmen are to be presented as authors of Anglo-Latin literature, then, the same process of establishing sources and influences must be undertaken.

Attempting to discern the degree to which one author was influenced by another, though, is a tricky business. There are a number of different levels of influence. Firstly, vocabulary can be borrowed. Author B can adopt some of Author A's less conventional vocabulary in an attempt to make his own work resemble the more idiosyncratic characteristics of his source. Although any conclusions gleaned from the close analysis of vocabulary must always be accepted with the caveat that words may have entered glossaries or grammars and so could have been picked up by the draftsman second-hand, borrowing unusual vocabulary can, in the right context, be a reliable indicator of conscious imitation.

Secondly, quotations and paraphrases can be used. For an author to choose to borrow a set of words, in more or less the same order, from another suggests an explicit and unashamed debt. In this way, Author B can acknowledge the influence of Author A, unequivocally placing his own work in the tradition of the earlier literature. Again, quotations can be drawn from secondary sources such as grammars; in general, though, identifying a direct quotation or an attempt to paraphrase an earlier writer's work can serve as good evidence that the later author was familiar with the work of the first or, at the very least, that he wished to associate himself unambiguously with it.

Finally, Author B can imitate Author A's work to the extent that his vocabulary, phrasing, syntax, diction and, indeed, whole style come to resemble the mode in which his model wrote. Not only is the vocabulary of B's text drawn from A's work, but B's structure, technical devices, tone and whole approach are all formed in the mould of A's work. The usual outcome, in this case, is that the later text could

almost be a production of the earlier author. Often, though, the effects employed by B, the imitator, represent an over-distillation of those used by his source. Rather than looking exactly like a product of the earlier author, the imitative text ends up looking like an exaggerated form of it. When Author B lacks something of the skill of his model, his prose might almost seem like a parody.

At any rate, by establishing the extent to which Author B sought to imitate Author A, it is usually possible to discover something useful about B's reading and education. Another methodology, however, is required to overcome the fundamental and persistent problem, which is typical of diplomatic prose, of how to distinguish between the work of a single draftsman and the work of a series of different individuals conspiring to produce similar-looking documents. In several cases, investigating whether a series of charters with similar or identical formulae were produced by one or several people will be essential in establishing the purpose, context and intellectual origins of those documents. After all, there is no point trying to analyse the education and background of a particular author if that author's work, in fact, records the work of several different people drawing on a shared formulary.

There are some useful literary parallels here. At the risk of making too sweeping a generalisation, where a text lacked a strong sense of authorial identity, the medieval copyists who reproduced it had comparatively little regard for accuracy. Accordingly, the text evolved in different directions as each copyist tweaked it according to his own personal tastes. This tendency can be seen in copies of the liturgy where a fluid, living text evolved almost daily and was copied accordingly. In the literary sphere, the most extreme example is, perhaps, the famous *Nauigatio S. Brendani*, where countless variant readings survive across more than a hundred manuscript witnesses to the text.¹⁹ On the other hand, texts written by a particularly well-known author, such as Bede or Aldhelm, were far more static, as more respect was given to the author's voice and more appropriate care was taken over their copying. A good example in this regard was Ælfric, whose concern that his words should not be miscopied bordered, at times, on the neurotic.²⁰

In the tenth century, multiple charters were produced containing formulae which were often identical or very similar. Were these

¹⁹ See, amongst others: Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'The Irish Life of Saint Brendan: Textual History, Structure and Date', in *The Brendan Legend: Texts and Versions*, The Northern World 24, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Clara Strijbosch (Leiden, 2006), pp. 117–58; and Jude Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions*, The Northern World 39 (Leiden, 2008).

²⁰ See Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity and the Changing Text', in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. Donald Scragg and Paul Szarmach (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 177–89.

repeated formulae the work of the same person who was careful to replicate his work each time he sat down to draw up a new document, or did the similarity emerge from a drive for uniformity on the part of an organised, coherent writing office, the scribes of which lacked the authority to alter their text? Indeed, establishing whether a charter text carried with it any sense of authorial identity would, in itself, likely prove to be a useful exercise. The best approach to this problem is an analysis of the nature of the variant readings within repeated formulae. Where a diplomatic formula is repeated in more than one document, the dynamics of how it does or does not change invariably fall into one of two types. In type I, it is repeated exactly, the only differences being minor, orthographical errors which, if the charter does not survive as an original document, could have entered the text at a post-Anglo-Saxon stage of its existence or simply be unintentional, contemporary scribal errors. In type II, the sense of the formula is repeated, but some words may be replaced with synonyms, the syntax may change slightly and clauses may be moved around, creating a similar but subtly different text.

Type I seems most likely to be the work of different individuals striving for uniformity. There is little evidence to suggest, for the most part, that Anglo-Saxon draftsmen regarded diplomatic formulae any differently to established literary texts: on being given an earlier formula to reuse in a new document, a later draftsman would generally have gone about it with all the perseverance and attention to detail that he would have dedicated to copying other literature.²¹ He was not the text's author and, as such, did not have the authority to meddle with it. Examples of this are usually seen in formulae which were recycled in different documents over long periods of time. A proem formula from ninth-century Wessex beginning *Regnante imperpetuum domino nostro Jhesu Christo. Cum cujus imperio hic labentis sæculi prosperitas* is a particularly good case in point. It was used in S 300 and S 301, which were both written in 850; then it was recycled in S 326, written ten years later in 860; then it was used again in S 217, written twenty-seven years later in 887. Given that thirty-seven years divide the formula's first and last appearances, it is unlikely that the same draftsman was responsible for writing all the charters which contained it. Each time the proem was copied, it was reproduced with few if any deliberate variants: lacking the authority to make changes, these draftsmen clearly aimed to copy the proem in its earlier form as closely as possible.²²

²¹ The situation was very different, however, when it came to compiling cartularies in the later Middle Ages, when copyists often substantially dismembered the documents they were charged with reproducing. See below, pp. 11–12.

²² An interesting way of interpreting this process may be the theory of memetics, which

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An example of formulae behaving in the way classified as type II can be seen in the work of the draftsman known as 'Æthelstan A', who worked in the 920s and 930s. Each time that 'Æthelstan A' wrote one of his trademark formulae, he had the authority to change it as he saw fit; so, instead of repeating the formula exactly, he edited his work, swapping words around, using synonyms (often with the intention of making the prose even more complicated), altering the syntax and fine-tuning his prose, producing a new recension of the text each time he wrote it. The sense remained consistent, but the way in which it was expressed evolved. In such a way, the behaviour of a formula can be taken as evidence of the nature of the composition of the diploma which contains it. If repeated precisely, then it usually represents a drive for uniformity on the part of different scribes who felt that they lacked the authorial conviction to tamper with another draftsman's work. However, if the sense is consistent but the way in which it is conveyed changes, then it may represent the work of a single author editing and amending his work as he wrote new versions of it.

Authenticity

Looming menacingly over any study of medieval documents is the problem of authenticity. Before any questions of authorship or production can be addressed, a sound corpus of reliably authentic texts has to be established. This process, however, is fraught with problems, since the question of how best to establish authenticity is one which, especially in an Anglo-Saxon context, remains stubbornly unresolved.²³ Behind any attempt to establish the authenticity (or otherwise) of medieval documents lies the 'archival principle', a misleadingly simple-sounding theory which teaches, in essence, that medieval documents must be assessed in context if they are to be properly understood.²⁴ Few Anglo-Saxon charters stand completely alone; instead, most have been bound or copied into cartularies, collections of documents designed to preserve the deeds of a particular institution (usually a religious foundation).²⁵ It is very rare

has been applied to Anglo-Saxon literature with fascinating consequences by Michael Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 306 (Tempe, AZ, 2006). Drout endeavoured to show how ideas, behaviours and literary formulae bounced around in a kind of collective imagination in the tenth century, surfacing and resurfacing here and there, evolving organically and taking on new forms as they did so. Our understanding of the evolution of charter formulae, which behave in a very similar way, may yet benefit from a similar approach.

²³ See Bates's comments in 'Charters and Historians', pp. 3–4.

²⁴ See Keynes, 'Church Councils', p. 48.

²⁵ An excellent and very accessible introduction to the process of compiling a cartulary is Constance B. Bouchard, 'Monastic Cartularies: Organizing Eternity', in *Charters, Cartularies*,

indeed that the compilers of these cartularies went about their work in an unbiased and even-handed way, innocently collecting whatever documents they could lay their hands on before reproducing them honestly and thoughtfully in such a way as to serve best the needs of the twenty-first-century historian. Rather, cartularies were usually put together with a very particular purpose in mind: 'they provide us', Charles Insley wrote, 'with an invaluable snapshot of how an institution [...] viewed itself at the point at which the cartulary was made'.²⁶ Some were compiled as direct responses to threats to an institution's landed possessions; others were acts of antiquarianism; others were concerned with bolstering the early history of a particular house in order to associate it with well-known historical events and characters; a few represent the personal interests of late medieval and early modern collectors, or show signs of having been meddled with by them.²⁷

To make matters worse, cartularies were often edited, copied or excerpted at various stages of their histories with the result that a single charter can exist in two or three (or sometimes many more) different versions, of which the earliest is not always the best. Sometimes the text will have been reproduced accurately; but sometimes it will have been cut, miscopied or misunderstood so badly as to render it almost incomprehensible. A perfectly acceptable, contemporary text can go through so many stages of edition, excerption, and augmentation at the hands of its copyist that its latest version can end up preserving only the very slightest traces of 'original' material. To dismiss these later copies would be a grave error: they have much to tell us about the reception and subsequent uses to which charters were put.

and Archives: The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the Medieval West. Proceedings of a Colloquium of the Commission Internationale de Diplomatie (Princeton and New York, 16–18 September 1999), Papers in Mediaeval Studies 17, ed. Adam J. Kosto and Anders Winroth (Toronto, 2002), pp. 22–32. See also Bedos-Rezak, 'Towards an Archaeology' in the same volume, pp. 43–60.

²⁶ Charles Insley, 'Remembering Communities Past: Exeter Cathedral in the Eleventh Century', in *Cathedrals, Communities and Conflict in the Anglo-Norman World*, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion 38, ed. Paul Dalton, Charles Insley and Louise J. Wilkinson (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 42.

²⁷ On the importance of understanding the transmission and reception of medieval documents more generally, see Arnold Esch, 'Chance et hasard de transmission: le problème de la représentativité et de la déformation de la transmission historique', in *Les tendances actuelles de l'histoire du Moyen Âge en France et en Allemagne. Actes des colloques de Sèvres (1997) et Göttingen (1998)*, Publications de la Sorbonne. Histoire ancienne et médiévale 66, ed. Jean-Claude Schmitt and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Paris, 2002), pp. 15–29. An informative survey of several French archives, in which some typical and very particular problems are encountered and addressed (demonstrating the importance of the archival approach), is Bruno Galland, Delphine Lannaud, Alexandra Gallo, Julien Briand and Léonard Dauphant, 'Constitutions d'archives', in *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge (Orient–Occident)*, Publications de la Sorbonne. Histoire ancienne et médiévale 102, ed. Régine le Jan (Paris, 2009), pp. 317–40.

However, in commenting on the style and language of Anglo-Saxon charters, some care does need to be taken. A particular problem with cartulary copies of charters is that the finer points of their Latin styles were often 'dumbed down', heavily abbreviated, or occasionally ignored altogether by later scribes who clearly had no idea what they were dealing with.²⁸ In order to achieve as undiluted a sense as possible of a particular scribe's style, therefore, the selection of documents belonging to a certain series, or which are considered to be the output of a specific scribe, is quite conservative in this study. In several cases, a basic corpus could be augmented with other material preserved in semi-spurious documents, in texts which have been heavily abbreviated, or in charters which show signs of significant later emendations. Where this is the case, the additional material is indicated, but its linguistic and literary features are not always analysed.

Every single cartulary, regardless of when it was put together or by whom, has a story to tell, and any attempt to understand the charters it contains without being as fully appraised of that story as possible usually proves disastrous. However, even with the archival principle resolutely to the fore, other problems surrounding authenticity remain. Most notably, there is no real consensus amongst diplomatic critics over what terms such as 'authentic', 'reliable', 'forged', 'spurious', and so on actually mean.²⁹ It is essential to disconnect altogether the idea of 'forgery' from the negative connotations which usually accompany it. Forgeries can be every bit as informative as authentic charters, if not more so in some cases.³⁰ A blatant forgery to an historian of one period may well be a valuable source to a student of another.³¹ To make matters even more complicated, the criteria used to discriminate between the authentic and the forged are highly fluid.³² Although, most scholars have traditionally approached their material mindful of the basic assumption that, as Brigitte Bedos-Rezak put it, 'forged

²⁸ Exactly this process is visible in the textual history of S 193, a sophisticated charter from ninth-century Mercia. A later copyist, who was clearly baffled by what he was looking at, drastically shortened and simplified the text: see Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings', pp. 117–18.

²⁹ For the semantics of these terms, Luciana Duranti, 'Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications', *Archivaria* 39 (1995): 5–10.

³⁰ On which, see Alfred Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries: False Documents in Fifteenth-Century England*, The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (Toronto, 2004). Hiatt's account of the forgeries of the Crowland archive is informative.

³¹ Discussions of the complex and fluid relationships between historians and their evidence are numerous and ongoing. See, for instance, David Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument* (Madison, WI, 2005). Of particular relevance for the diplomatic critic is Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Changing Authorities in History and the Archives* (Oxford, 2011).

³² Cf. Esche's comment in 'Chance et hasard', p. 28: 'ces critères de sélection évoluent à chaque génération.'

documents must be differentiated from genuine',³³ this attitude has been ferociously deconstructed in recent years, not least by Bedos-Rezak herself.³⁴

In the Anglo-Saxon context, the thoughts of Albert Bruckner, Sir Frank Stenton and Simon Keynes on the matter of identifying forgeries remain fine guiding principles,³⁵ but there remains no foolproof method. Although some basic tests, such as close analysis of the witness list, a trawl for clearly anachronistic formulae and an awareness of any conspicuously suspicious palaeographical or codicological features can all help in establishing the veracity of a document, it remains a time-consuming and controversial area. There are some instances where forgeries are easy to spot. The case of the Crowland cartulary provides a most impressive example of just how shameless the medieval forger could be. Following a devastating fire in 1091, most of Crowland's archive was destroyed. Shortly afterwards, Crowland's abbot, Ingulf, according to the *Historia Ingulfi*,³⁶ decided that the evidence of Crowland's endowment needed a bit of shoring up and so, apparently in the company of five centegenarian monks, he set about 'resurrecting' the abbey's diplomas, his activities being recorded by no less a figure than Orderic Vitalis.³⁷ The charters he 'created' are amongst the most spectacular and unconvincing forgeries of Anglo-Saxon charters still in existence. Overly long, oddly extravagant and overflowing at every point with the most outrageous anachronisms, they are an object lesson in how not to forge a charter.

More frequently, however, forgers of Anglo-Saxon charters were a little shrewder than Ingulf. For obvious reasons, forgeries were usually made to look as authentic as possible, utilising appropriate formulae and sometimes even being written in imitative script. There is no doubt that medieval forgers had often studied contemporary charters very carefully; in some cases, they may even have had an earlier charter in front of them when they wrote. Forgeries can therefore tell us much about the transmission and reception of earlier documents; about the willingness and facility of later readers to copy,

³³ Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages*, Visualising the Middle Ages 3 (Leiden, 2011), p. 12.

³⁴ See, for instance, Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, ch. 1; and Armando Petrucci, 'The Illusion of Authentic History: Documentary Evidence' in his *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy. Studies in the History of Written Culture*, trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven, 1995), pp. 236–50.

³⁵ Albert Bruckner, 'Diplomatik der älteren angelsächsischen Urkunden', *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 61 (1965): 11–45; Stenton, *Latin Charters*, pp. 1–30; and Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 137–9.

³⁶ For an edition, see Henry T. Riley, ed. and trans., *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the Continuations by Peter of Blois and Anonymous Writers* (New York, 1854).

³⁷ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II.25; Marjorie Chibnall, ed. and trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, OMT, 6 vols (Oxford 1969–80).

interpret and reimagine the words and ideas of earlier authors, and to manipulate them in their favour;³⁸ and, also, about the activity of institutional memory at different foundations.³⁹ Importantly, 'authenticity' is not an absolute concept in the Anglo-Saxon context. In some cases, forgeries may very well record the essence of a genuine transaction; elsewhere, while the particulars of the transaction might be falsified, the formulae and language of the document may reflect the genuine practices of the time; or the witness list might be genuine, copied directly from an earlier charter; or the boundary clause could be authentic, albeit in a spurious context; or the royal styles used by the king could be accurate. Or, of course, any number of these features could coincide to create a document which is both authentic and forged in equal measure. In short, the authenticity of a document depends entirely on the questions asked of it: just because the details of, say, a tenth-century land transaction were invented by a mischievous scribe two centuries later does not mean that the same scribe did not copy the proem, sanction and witness list of his model accurately.

Forgery has existed for as long as there have been documents worth forging. Unfortunately for us, despite the development of increasingly complex approaches to guaranteeing authenticity over the course of the Middle Ages, ingenious medieval forgers often managed to stay one step ahead of the authorities. The very act of recording a donation in writing was often seen as an act of authentication in itself: memory, it was realised, was often imperfect and, moreover, was liable to decay quickly. Therefore, by committing one's actions to vellum, one ensured their longevity and, moreover, confirmed their authenticity. The sentiment, which was not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic,⁴⁰ was expressed in almost poetic terms in S 346, a charter written in 889 and preserved at Worcester:

seu nebulæ neglegentiarum nubiferis deprivationum fuscationibus,
a recte possessionis jure radiantem justitiæ Phoebum obnubilant,
quapropter necesse cuilibet homini est, ut litteratoriis apicibus omnia
atquisita seu possessa ob præsentium sive succedentium cantelam.

³⁸ See Hiatt, *Medieval Forgeries*.

³⁹ On which, see Sarah Foot, 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record or Story?', in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 16, ed. E. M. Tyler and R. Balzaretti (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 39–66; Georges Declercq, 'Originals and Cartularies: The Organisation of Archival Memory (Ninth–Eleventh Centuries)', in *Charters and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Society*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 5, ed. Karl Heidecker (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 147–70; and, more generally, Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1994), ch. 4; and his 'Land, Language and Memory in Europe 700–1100', *TRHS* 6th Series, 9 (1999): 169–84.

⁴⁰ See Foot, 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters', p. 40.

if the mists of neglect, with the cloud-bringing obfuscations of forgetfulness, obscure the radiant sun of justice from the rightful law of possession, then it shall be unavoidable for all men that all their acquisitions or possessions must be confirmed with the forms of letters for the security of present or successive generations.

Simply writing a grant down, however, was no absolute guarantee of authenticity. In different parts of Europe, including Anglo-Saxon England, the act of donation became associated with all kinds of ritualistic behaviour designed to emphasise the sincerity of the grant.⁴¹ It is not the purpose of this study to get bogged down in arguments over authenticity. Where a charter has been edited in BACS, the editor's opinion is generally followed. Elsewhere, the balance of current scholarly debate is indicated.

European and Anglo-Saxon diplomatics

In the tenth century, England was probably better connected to the continent than it had been at any point since the withdrawal of Rome in the fifth century; it is a little ironic, then, that some of those who have turned their attention to the history of Anglo-Saxon England have, either by accident or design, insulated themselves somewhat from the parallel endeavours of their European contemporaries. In examining the charters of tenth-century England, however, it is impossible to overlook the considerable achievements of European charter scholarship. Indeed, there are those who have made the argument (and it is an argument that is not without merit) that the whole discipline is, in essence, continental.

Certainly, the study of charters, 'diplomatics' as it is known,⁴² began in France. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jean Mabillon, a French Benedictine monk and palaeographer, published his *De re diplomatica libri VI*, which has come to be considered the foundation of the discipline.⁴³ Mabillon himself recognised the novelty of what he was doing: *novum antiquariae artis genus aggredior* he wrote at the

⁴¹ The full process in its Frankish context has been described by Robert-Henri Bautier, 'L'authentification des actes privés dans la France médiévale', in his *Chartes, sceaux et chanceries: études de diplomatie et de sigillographie médiévales I*, Mémoires et documents de l'École des chartes 34 (Paris, 1990), pp. 269–78. The ritual aspects of Anglo-Saxon donations are discussed below, pp. 66–9.

⁴² For a much fuller discussion of the history of the discipline, as well as a useful definition of the term 'diplomatic', see Olivier Guyotjeannin, Jacques Pycke and Benoît-Michel Tock, *La diplomatie médiévale, L'atelier du médiéviste 2* (Turnhout, 1993), pp. 1–28.

⁴³ Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica libri VI. In quibus quidquid ad veterum instrumentorum antiquitatem, materiam, scripturam et stilum; quidquid ad sigilla, monogrammata, subscriptiones ac notas chronologicas; quidquid inde ad antiquariam, historicam, forensemque disciplinam pertinet, explicatur et illustratur. Accedunt Commentarius de antiquis Regum Francorum Palatiis*

very start of Book I.⁴⁴ Importantly, Mabillon was encouraged in his work by the Byzantinist, Charles du Fresne, sieur du Cange, whose linguistic and philological expertise was instrumental in guiding Mabillon's approach to establishing the authenticity of medieval documents.⁴⁵ Indeed, it was authenticity, above all, which occupied Mabillon. So much secular and religious history, he explained, was founded upon the evidence of charters, that a rigorous interrogation of these documents with a view to establishing whether they might be trusted or not had become unavoidable.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the centre of gravity of European diplomatics had shifted away from France, coming to settle instead in the German-speaking portions of Europe. Theodore Sickel, an Austrian who had studied in Paris prior to his appointment to a professorial post in Vienna, modernised the discipline, developing an approach to diplomatic criticism in which the role of the central writing office, or chancery, was brought to prominence, which is where it has remained, more or less, ever since.⁴⁶ In establishing the authenticity of a given document, Sickel argued, the context of the writing office that produced it had to be considered.⁴⁷ For Sickel, who had in his mind a clear idea of exactly what the 'perfect' product of any given medieval chancery was supposed to look like, deviance of almost any kind from this 'chancery archetype' was interpreted as a clear sign of forgery and taken as grounds for immediate dismissal. While Sickel's work has been qualified, challenged and even quite heavily criticised in some quarters,⁴⁸ his thinking continues to exert a powerful influence over the discipline. His doctrine that the central,

Veterum scripturarum varia specimina, tabulis LX comprehensa. Nova ducentorum, et amplius monumentorum collectio. Editio Secunda ab ipso Auctore recognita, emendata et aucta (Paris, 1709).

⁴⁴ Ibid., I, p. 1: 'I am beginning a new kind of historical discipline.'

⁴⁵ Mabillon thanked du Fresne in fond terms in the introduction to *De re diplomatica*. Scholarship on Mabillon is abundant; a good starting point is James Westfall Thompson, 'The Age of Mabillon and Montfaucon', *American Historical Review* 47 (1942): 225–44; see also, Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *Les historiens et la monarchie, 1: Jean Mabillon*, 4 vols (Paris, 1988); and Rutherford Aris, 'Jean Mabillon (1632–1707)', in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline, I: History*, ed. Helen Damico and Joseph B. Zavadil (New York, 1994), pp. 15–32. On the literary background of Mabillon and his circle, see Josephine de Boer, 'Men's Literary Circles in Paris 1610–1660', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 53 (1938): 730–81.

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive study of the Carolingian chancery, see Robert-Henri Bautier, 'La chancellerie et les actes royaux dans les royaumes carolingiens', *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 142 (1984): 5–80; for a more general description, see Henri-Jean Martin, *Histoire et pouvoirs de l'écrit* (Paris, 1988), ch. 4, translated into English by Lydia G. Cochrane and published as *The History and Power of Writing* (Chicago, 1994). An accessible, though brief introduction to the chancery in later medieval France can be found in Guyotjeannin et al., *Diplomatique*, pp. 240–5.

⁴⁷ Theodore Sickel, *Lehre von den Urkunden der ersten Karolinger (751–840)* (Vienna, 1867).

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Hans-Walter Klewitz, 'Cancellaria: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des geistlichen Hofdienstes', in his *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Aalen, 1971), pp. 13–48.

royal chancery should be the starting point of any investigation of medieval diplomatic material certainly retains much of its potency. Put simply, 'the perspective of classical diplomatics in dealing with early medieval royal charters was and still is that of the monarch.'⁴⁹

However, alternative views and approaches certainly do exist: in the 1980s, Herwig Wolfram and his students used charters as tools for exploring cultural and intellectual history, raising challenging, new prospects as they did so.⁵⁰ Their work has underpinned subsequent movements which have used charters to shed light on issues of communication, literacy and conflict resolution in medieval Europe.⁵¹ Elsewhere, the cardinal importance of charters within the field of prosopography can scarcely be overestimated.⁵² Yet, fixation with the chancery, along with the tendency to approach charters top-down, from the perspective of the monarch who presided over their creation, remains. In a review article published in 2000, Mark Mersiowsky made a powerful case for an alternative approach: 'in addition to the sovereign act of a monarch who produces a charter', he wrote, 'the interested beneficiary appears, who, for motives that we need to question, desires a charter and in so doing, accepts the sovereignty. Charter reception as acceptance: more research from this perspective might be of importance.'⁵³

The fundamental question for the student of Anglo-Saxon diplomatics, which remains without an altogether satisfactory answer, is how it ought to be slotted into the broader panorama of European scholarship. In the past, there was a prevailing sense that, as Christopher Cheney put it in 1956, 'England is backward in diplomatic study'.⁵⁴ Such criticism was considerably more justified in

⁴⁹ Mark Mersiowsky, 'Towards a Reappraisal of Carolingian Sovereign Charters', in *Charters and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Society*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 5, ed. Karl Heidecker (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 15–26, at p. 19. Compare with the comments of Hagen Keller very much to the same effect, which are quoted by Mersiowsky: 'Zu den Siegeln der Karolinger und der Ottonen: Urkunden als "Hoheitszeichen" in der Kommunikation des Königs mit seinen Getreuen', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 32 (1998): 400–41, at p. 425.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the essays collected in *Intitulatio III. Lateinische Herrschertitel und Herrschertitulaturen vom 7. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Anton Scharer and Herwig Wolfram (Vienna, 1988).

⁵¹ Such as: *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 1, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout, 1999); *Medieval Legal Process: Physical, Spoken and Written Performance in the Middle Ages*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 22, ed. Marco Mostert and P. S. Barnwell (Turnhout, 2011); *The Settlement of Disputes in Medieval Europe*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge, 1986); and Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1997).

⁵² See, for instance: Maria Hillebrandt, 'The Cluniac Charters. Remarks on a Quantitative Approach for Prosopographical Studies', *Medieval Prosopography* 3 (1982): 3–25; Chris Given-Wilson, 'Royal Charter Witness Lists, 1327–1399', *Medieval Prosopography* 18 (1997): 93–109.

⁵³ Mersiowsky 'Towards a Reappraisal', p. 23.

⁵⁴ Christopher Robert Cheney, *The Records of Medieval England: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 12.

the 1950s than it is today. Nevertheless, some significant differences of methodology, training and approach still divide British and European diplomaticists. The biggest difference of all, perhaps, is the nature of the source material itself. In some respects, it is tempting to see the Anglo-Saxon diplomatic tradition as an unconventional offshoot from the European mainstream, as a tradition which was basically the same as its continental equivalents, but which had developed a few eccentricities of its own. After all, regardless of where and by whom it is written, a charter is still a charter: with some notable exceptions, Merovingian, Carolingian, Capetian, Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon royal charters all tend to record grants of land and privileges from the king; usually, they have witness lists of some kind; usually, they were written at least partially in Latin; and usually, they were committed to the archive of a religious house for safekeeping. Yet, there is much about the Anglo-Saxon diplomatic tradition that sets it apart. It had no chancery before the tenth (or perhaps the late ninth) century, which demands at once that the traditional perspective taken by continental diplomaticists be comprehensively rethought when dealing with early English documents. The conservative assumption of 'the existence of an original document perceived as unique, of an Ur-text from which later versions necessarily *had* to originate, and against whose authenticity the adequateness of any other copy may need to be tested' simply doesn't work in the Anglo-Saxon context.⁵⁵ While regional styles can be identified, and particular tendencies associated with particular foundations, this is a long way from the 'archetype' which dominated Sickel's thinking. The Anglo-Saxons, moreover, had no *cancellarius* until just before the Conquest;⁵⁶ their charters never imposed a single financial penalty; they never used a seal as a mark of authenticity before the reign of Edward 'the Confessor';⁵⁷ and not only did they make significant use of the vernacular, but they came to be written in extraordinary, 'literary' Latin of a kind which was never used for writing legal documents on the continent. Another major difference

⁵⁵ Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Towards an Archaeology of the Medieval Charter: Textual Production and Reproduction in Northern French *Chartriers*', in *Charters, Cartularies, and Archives: The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the Medieval West. Proceedings of a Colloquium of the Commission Internationale de Diplomatique* (Princeton and New York, 16–18 September 1999), *Papers in Mediaeval Studies* 17, ed. Adam J. Kosto and Anders Winroth (Toronto, 2002), pp. 43–60, at pp. 43–4. Bedos-Rezak herself constructively criticised this approach. Compare with Guyotjeannin *et al.*, *Diplomatique*, pp. 17–21.

⁵⁶ On Anglo-Saxon England's one and only *cancellarius* (who, perhaps fittingly, was almost certainly not an Anglo-Saxon himself), see Simon Keynes, 'Regenbald the Chancellor (sic)', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1988): 185–222.

⁵⁷ On which see Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (2nd edn, London, 1993), pp. 312–14; and Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'The King Enthroned, A New Theme in Anglo-Saxon Royal Iconography: The Seal of Edward the Confessor and Its Political Implications', in her *Form and Order in Medieval France: Studies in Social and Quantitative Sigillography* (Aldershot, 1993), pp. 54–88.

(which has often been overlooked) is that the Anglo-Saxons seem, for much of their history, to have made little or no distinction between royal diplomas, private deeds and ecclesiastical charters.⁵⁸

Of course, Anglo-Saxon diplomatic did not exist in a vacuum, and placing too much emphasis on its individuality would certainly draw accusatory howls of parochialism.⁵⁹ But to come at it whilst too much under the influence of the Merovingian, Carolingian, Capetian or Ottonian traditions can be just as perilous. Although he was referring to medieval records more generally, Christopher Cheney's observation that English documents 'only speak when they are spoken to, and they will not talk to strangers', suits the context of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic very well.⁶⁰ Even the work of Europe's greatest medievalists on Anglo-Saxon diplomatic has suffered, at times, from excessive 'Eurocentricity' (for want of a much better word), and at others, from an insufficiently nuanced understanding of the circumstances which prevailed in England before the Conquest. Richard Drögereit, for example, supposed that the use of a certain formula across several charters indicated that those charters must have been composed by the same draftsman, as might have been the case with the French and German material with which he was familiar.⁶¹ Pierre Chaplais was troubled by the lack of consistency that he perceived amongst the Anglo-Saxon charters of the late seventh and early eighth centuries: 'the only features which they have in common', he wrote, 'are first the presence in their text of one or more Italian formulae [...] secondly the absence [...] of any mention of the scribe's name.'⁶² Chaplais overlooked the many, more subtle consistencies inherent in the Anglo-Saxon documents mainly, it seems, because his yardstick was the contemporary continental and Mediterranean traditions, where control over charter production and the use of formularies ensured the production of much more obviously uniform documents.⁶³ Perhaps most famous of all is Timothy Reuter's infelicitous comment about the authenticity of Anglo-Saxon charters: 'Anglo-Saxon diplomaticists', he wrote, 'persist in the belief that it is possible to be slightly dead or

⁵⁸ See above, p. 1 n. 3.

⁵⁹ On the dangers of which, see Thomas M. Bisson, 'La terre et les hommes: A Programme Fulfilled?', *French History* 14 (2000): 322–45.

⁶⁰ Cheney, *The Records of Medieval England*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Richard Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 13 (1935): 335–436; Simon Keynes critiqued Drögereit's approach in *Diplomas*, p. 18. On the identification and role of different scribes in Carolingian Frankia, see Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley 400–1100*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 47 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 111–18; and Benoît-Michel Tock, *Scribes, souscripteurs et témoins dans les actes privés en France (VIIe–début du XIIe siècle)*, Atelier de recherches sur les textes médiévaux 9 (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 275–304.

⁶² Chaplais, 'Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine', pp. 100–1.

⁶³ On which: Nicholas Everett, 'Scribes and Charters in Lombard Italy', *Studi Medievali* 3rd series, 16 (2000): 39–83.

partly pregnant'; he continued to complain that the use of charters for historical purposes was made much more difficult 'when there is a subtly graduated range of conditions rather than the standard ones known on the continent'.⁶⁴ Even historians of later medieval English history have been guilty of misunderstanding Anglo-Saxon diplomatics: 'if in Anglo-Saxon England there was no such tradition of a chancery inherited from the imperial past', wrote the great R. Allen Brown, more than half a decade after a compelling case for the existence of centralised charter-production in tenth-century England had been made by Simon Keynes, 'there was certainly no compulsion to invent one'.⁶⁵ Drögereit, Chaplais, Reuter and Brown were all towering figures within their fields, whose contributions to the modern understanding of the Middle Ages were immense, and whose knowledge of medieval European history was almost incomprehensibly vast; that they, of all people, could commit such oversights stands as a potent warning of the dangers of taking an insufficiently sensitive approach to Anglo-Saxon charters. Whilst a certain orthodoxy prevails in some circles, French and German scholars have long since acknowledged that 'selon les périodes, les régions, les auteurs, les traditions, et les matières traitées, des différences notables apparaissent'.⁶⁶ Anglo-Saxon England is no different. Of course, familiarity with the contemporary continental diplomatic background is essential for any student of the Anglo-Saxon diplomatic tradition, but it must be borne in mind at all times that it is, as Patrick Wormald put it, very much *sui generis*.⁶⁷ For all the superficial similarities, Anglo-Saxon charters remained, throughout their history, an altogether different breed from their continental cousins.

Editing charters

One major, and very frustrating, difference between Anglo-Saxon and continental charters was, until comparatively recently, that the corpus of extant Anglo-Saxon charters lacked a modern, critical edition to

⁶⁴ Timothy Reuter, 'Kings, Nobles and Others: "Base" and "Superstructure" in the Ottonian Period', in his *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), p. 297. For the difficulties associated with discriminating between forged and authentic Anglo-Saxon charters, and an explanation of why this 'graduated approach' is necessary, see above, pp. 11–16.

⁶⁵ R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest* (2nd edn, Woodbridge, 1985), p. 61. The existence of a centralised writing office, or chancery, in the tenth century was established by Simon Keynes in *Diplomas*.

⁶⁶ Guyotjeannin *et al.*, *Diplomatique*, p. 223.

⁶⁷ Patrick Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of the English: The Charter Evidence*, The Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1985), p. 14. This article has been reprinted with a useful afterword in *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early Christian Society and Its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford, 2006), pp. 135–68.

do it justice. Indeed, it has been traditional for any commentator on the subject to begin their work by lamenting the absence of such an edition.⁶⁸ Thirty years ago, Simon Keynes, opening his definitive work on the diplomas of Æthelred 'the Unready', added his voice to the chorus of dissatisfaction bemoaning the 'lack of a satisfactory edition' of early English diplomas.⁶⁹ Thankfully, however, such complaints are no longer necessary. When Keynes was writing, in the 1970s, Peter Sawyer's great catalogue of Anglo-Saxon charter material (to which any diplomaticist pays a silent tribute every time he refers to a diploma by its S-number) had been published but the epic series of editions which it demanded, the British Academy Anglo-Saxon Charters Series (BACS), had only recently been imagined. This heroic project, designed to produce comprehensive, modern, scholarly editions of the texts of the 1,600 or so extant Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas, wills, leases and other miscellaneous documents, archive by archive, to rival and in many ways exceed those formidable volumes which have existed in France, Germany and Scandinavia since the nineteenth century, was always going to be a mammoth undertaking. At the end of the 1970s, only one of these new works was available to Keynes: Alistair Campbell's edition of the charters of Rochester, which had emerged in 1973. Another, Peter Sawyer's edition of the Burton cartulary, followed in 1979. Mary O'Donovan's edition of the Sherborne archive then came along in 1988. The pace soon picked up and, thanks largely to the tireless and brilliant work of Susan Kelly, many of the most important archives containing Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas have now been published and are available in a series of fine editions.

At the time of writing, the archives of Rochester; Burton; Sherborne; St Augustine's, Canterbury; Shaftesbury; Selsey; Abingdon; New Minster, Winchester; St Paul's, London; Malmesbury; Bath and Wells; Peterborough; St Albans; Glastonbury; York and the Northern Houses; and Christ Church, Canterbury have been published. Editions of the archives of Barking; Bury St Edmunds; Crediton and Exeter; the Midland Houses; Westminster; Wilton; Old Minster, Winchester; and Worcester are in various stages of preparation or planning.⁷⁰ This has led to there being something of a disparity in the quality of the texts available for the present study. When referring to a charter, where possible, the British Academy edition, in which the text has usually

⁶⁸ See W. H. Stevenson, *The Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents now in the Bodleian Library*, ed. Arthur Sampson Napier and W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1895), p. viii: 'it cannot be said that the Old English charters have yet been edited'. Compare with Stenton, *The Latin Charters*, p. 9 and Pierre Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma', in *Prisca Munimenta*, pp. 28–42, p. 29; both echo Stevenson's sentiments.

⁶⁹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. xi.

⁷⁰ For more on the progress of BACS, as of 2013, see Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 180–2.

been edited to the highest modern standards, has been used in the first instance. However, for the texts of some charters, it has been necessary to refer back to the two early editions of Anglo-Saxon charters, John Mitchell Kemble's six-volume *Codex diplomaticus ævi saxonici* and Walter de Grey Birch's three-volume *Cartularium saxonicum*.⁷¹ While both of these are of inestimable value as monuments to early academic interest in the first English diplomas and are fine works in their own right, neither serves the modern diplomatic critic especially well, nor can either be used without some qualification.⁷² Pierre Chaplais, somewhat uncharitably (though undeniably accurately), described Kemble's work as unsatisfactory, incomplete and inaccurate; he was not much kinder to Birch.⁷³ Indeed, both Kemble and Birch were products of a nineteenth-century academy which regarded the extant corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters as a single, continuous tradition and, as a result, edited the documents in chronological order, punctuating them almost at random and paying heed neither to the archives from which they originated nor to the reigns of the kings under whose auspices they had been composed. Furthermore, neither had had the benefit of A. E. Housman's epoch-making thoughts on how a text should be edited (Housman's definitive editions of Manilius, Juvenal and Lucan did not start to be published until 1903, 1905 and 1926 respectively; his seminal lecture, 'The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', did not appear in print until 1922).⁷⁴ In Kemble and Birch's defence, producing a diplomatic edition of a charter which existed in only one or, at most, a few related manuscripts was a very different matter from editing a text which survived in dozens, scores or even hundreds. Moreover, it is not as though they were flying completely blind: both had the important precedent of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* series along with the critical principles of its first editor, Georg Heinrich Pertz, on which to rely. Nevertheless, while it is a testament to their editions that they can still be used (albeit with some caveats) more than a century after they were compiled, Kemble's confused and incomplete ordering of his material and Birch's often unorthodox and subjective editorial decisions must be borne in mind when resorting to these works.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, with BACS starting to make strong progress, the natural next step was to digitise this material.

⁷¹ Walter de Grey Birch, *Cartularium saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History*, 3 vols (London, 1885–95); and John Mitchell Kemble, *Codex diplomaticus ævi Saxonici*, 6 vols (London, 1839–48).

⁷² See Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 42–5.

⁷³ Chaplais, 'Origin and Authenticity', p. 29.

⁷⁴ A. E. Housman, 'The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', in *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman: Volume III, 1915–1936*, ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 1058–70.

For a subject which has traditionally been thought of as rather stuffy and a little *recherché*, it is very gratifying indeed that Anglo-Saxon studies, and the study of Anglo-Saxon charters in particular, has so often been in the vanguard when it has come to harnessing the almost unlimited potential of digital and online resources. In the field of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, the breakthrough came with Sean Miller's anglo-saxons.net, which reproduced searchable text editions of every charter published by Kemble and Birch, along with previously unpublished material from the Barking archive, ordered by S-number, searchable by king, date, archive or year, placed beneath an updated summary of the scholarship on each document. In using this website every day, it was all too easy to forget just what an extraordinary resource it was. When Simon Keynes wrote his *Diplomas of Æthelred 'the Unready'*, he relied upon huge filing cabinets full of meticulously categorised diplomatic formulae; cross referencing a formula or an unusual word across the charters of a single king or archive, let alone across the whole of the tenth century, required hours of painstaking work. Tracing a formula through the whole history of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic demanded almost superhuman patience and dedication. Sean Miller's website changed all that: a process which might once have taken hours, or even days, could now be accomplished in a matter of seconds. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the site, though, was that this incredible resource, which was unmatched when it was first published (and remained so for some years thereafter), was freely available.

The legacy of anglo-saxons.net was duly honoured by two more recent websites, *ASChart* (aschart.kcl.ac.uk) and the *Electronic Sawyer* (esawyer.org.uk). The former makes available all pre-900 Anglo-Saxon charters marked up in XML, enabling the corpus to be searched in a far more nuanced way than had been possible before; the latter is an updated and improved version of anglo-saxons.net, containing some (though, at the time of writing, not all) of the BACS texts along with an updated bibliography, information on archives and manuscripts, and so on. These websites do not stand alone by any means: the *Digital Palaeography* project (digipal.eu), *Langscape* (langscape.org.uk), the *Early English Laws* website (earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk), and the groundbreaking *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (pase.ac.uk) have all, in their own ways, brought the study of early medieval England firmly into the twenty-first century. The *Anglo-Saxon Cluster* project (ascluster.org) is bringing *ASChart*, *eSawyer*, *Langscape* and *PASE* together into one, immense, fully interactive resource which enables an almost unlimited range of searches across an enormous breadth of material. Little of this would have been possible without the expertise (and, often, patience) of the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College London.

If Kemble's *Codex* marks the beginning of the modern era of Anglo-Saxon charter scholarship and the British Academy Anglo-Saxon Charters Series brings us into the digital age, something might still be said about the century in the middle. Throughout the twentieth century, several attempts were made to produce viable editions of different groups of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic material. The result was a rather eccentric body of work. In 1930, Dorothy Whitelock edited and translated the extant corpus of Anglo-Saxon wills in a work which remains a classic in the field;⁷⁵ in 1939, A. J. Robertson produced editions of more than a hundred miscellaneous, vernacular documents;⁷⁶ then, twenty years later, Florence Harmer's *Anglo-Saxon Writs* appeared, which made available good, critical editions of most of the extant corpus of Anglo-Saxon writs, the majority of which had been issued in the eleventh century.⁷⁷ These works were complemented by H. P. R. Finberg's *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, *The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall* and *The Early Charters of Wessex*; Margaret Gelling's *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley*; and Cyril Hart's *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands*,⁷⁸ which were all published between 1961 and 1975. In its original aims and in the scope of its ambitions – to produce up-to-date, accessible editions of Anglo-Saxon charters – the Early Charters series deserves considerable credit. Finberg, the general editor of the series, was an accomplished historian and an enthusiastic diplomatic critic. Margaret Gelling and Cyril Hart were major names in the field and brought to the project all of their considerable experience of and insight into early medieval English history.

Yet, for all its promise, the Early Charters series has become notorious for its shortcomings. Firstly, editorial decisions about the authenticity of the documents published in these collections were often arbitrary and inconsistent and Finberg's cheerful optimism towards his material drew some severe criticism. In his review of *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, Henry Loyn suggested, rather generously, that Finberg considered 'a surprisingly high proportion' of charters to be wholly genuine.⁷⁹ In her review of the next instalment in the series, *The Early Charters of Wessex*, Dorothy Whitelock was less

⁷⁵ Dorothy Whitelock, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, Cambridge Studies in English Legal History (Cambridge 1930).

⁷⁶ Agnes Jane Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, Cambridge Studies in English Legal History (Cambridge 1939; 2nd edn, 1956).

⁷⁷ Florence Harmer, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester 1959; reprinted Stamford, 1989).

⁷⁸ H. P. R. Finberg, ed., *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1961), *The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall* (Leicester 1963) and *The Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964). Margaret Gelling, ed., *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley* (Leicester, 1979); Cyril R. Hart, ed., *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (Leicester, 1975).

⁷⁹ Henry R. Loyn, 'Review of *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*', *Economic History Review* NS. 14 (1961): 341–2.

ambiguous in her criticism: 'One would like', she wrote in the *English Historical Review*, with Finberg's editorial principles firmly in her sights, 'to see the diplomatic evidence set out, before one accepts the views Dr Finberg bases on the assumption that these texts are reliable.'⁸⁰ Making a judgement about the authenticity of diplomatic material, though, is a business that is always fraught with danger; charters are moving targets, and it is rare for any two diplomatic critics to agree on very much. Perhaps more damaging to the Early Charters series, then, was its somewhat irregular geographical categorisation of its material. The volumes were ordered by extremely vague geographical denominations which were then further subdivided by modern county boundaries. The archival principle of diplomatic criticism, whereby the individual character, textual history and transmission of a particular archive are considered essential to building an understanding of the charters contained within it, was completely ignored, very much to the detriment of the series as a whole. Several whole archives (not least those critical collections of charters from the two Canterbury houses, Christ Church and St Augustine's) fell through the net altogether; elsewhere, archives were not always published in their entirety and, even when they were, documents from a single archive were sometimes scattered across two volumes. The result was a series of subjective, incomplete, incoherent and inconsistent exercises in local history which, as Colin Chase observed in his review of *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, constituted 'a very selective guide to the charters, without any systematic concern for the wealth of political, legal, social, and even literary information in them'.⁸¹ In *The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall*, Finberg posed the question: 'can we not parcel out the field and attack the problem on a geographical basis?'⁸² The answer came back as a resounding 'no'.

Summary

This, then, is an exciting time for Anglo-Saxon diplomatics. For the first time, the text of every extant charter written in England between the seventh century and the Conquest is easily accessible, many of which have been edited to the highest modern standards. It is now possible to move decisively beyond questions of authenticity and textual criticism towards issues of cultural and intellectual history. Tenth-century charters are almost like diary entries; they tell us who

⁸⁰ Dorothy Whitelock, 'Review of *The Early Charters of Wessex*', *EHR* 81 (1966): 100–3.

⁸¹ Colin Chase, 'Review of *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley*', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 12 (1980): 175–6.

⁸² H. P. R. Finberg, ed., *The Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall* (Leicester 1963), p. 3.

was where when, what they did whilst they were there, and, most importantly of all, how they wanted the substance of their activities to be recorded and conveyed. It seems obvious, though it can easily be forgotten, that the essence of any charter is its language. In almost every charter ever written in Anglo-Saxon England, the king speaks directly to us, usually in the first person. It is pleasing to wonder whether the text might even preserve some remnant of the very words he uttered during the process of the donation.⁸³ When we read a charter, therefore, we are brought into the very presence of the monarch under whose auspices it was composed; when we deconstruct its prose, we are pulling apart the words of the king himself. It is hardly possible to get any closer. Yet, charters generally do not record the private thoughts and feelings of those kings.⁸⁴ Instead, they are carefully and precisely stage-managed pronouncements of royal authority, designed by the most erudite of the kingdom's intelligentsia to impress a very specific message upon their audience.

Above all, it is the purpose of this study to work out what that message was, who that audience was likely to have been and why charters became so central to the exercising of royal power in the tenth century, and to locate them more firmly in the intellectual history of ninth- and tenth-century England. No other genre of medieval text refuses so resolutely to be categorised: only charters modulate effortlessly from the legal to the literary, often encompassing the poetic and even the homiletic on the way. They are remarkable documents, and their authors must have been equally extraordinary individuals. Some, such as 'Æthelstan A', were amongst the most spectacular Latinists of their age. Yet, they have too often been confined in the scholarly literature to footnotes, asides and maybe the odd half-chapter here and there. Both charters and authors, then, deserve a little more attention.

⁸³ On questions of ritual and of the king's voice, see below, pp. 46–9, 66–9.

⁸⁴ With one or two exceptions, perhaps, the most notable being those charters of Æthelred 'the Unready', in which the text assumes a markedly penitential tone: see Levi Roach, 'Penitential Discourse in the Charters of Æthelred "the Unready"', *JEH* 64 (2013): 258–76.

Brave New World: the Charters of Alfred and Edward

George Godfrey Cunningham, in the first volume of his *Lives of Eminent and Illustrious Englishmen*, published the year after Queen Victoria's accession, eulogised Alfred (his first eminent and illustrious Englishman) in a tone which has since become all too familiar: 'England', he wrote, 'has had no monarch, or patriot, of whom she has more reason to be proud, nor indeed does the history of any nation record a more perfect character, than this Anglo-Saxon sovereign.'¹ A little more than half a century earlier, no less a figure than David Hume had adopted a similar tone in his own acclamation of Alfred's achievements. He thought Alfred 'the greatest prince after Charlemagne that had appeared in Europe during several ages [...] one of the wisest and best that ever adorned the annals of any nation'.² Yet, Hume, ever the sceptic, also harboured suspicions about Alfred's impeccable character:

fortune alone [he wrote] by throwing him into that barbarous age, deprived him of historians worthy to transmit his fame to posterity; and we wish to see him delineated in more lively colours, and with more particular strokes, that we may at least perceive some of those small specks and blemishes, from which, as a man, it is impossible he could be entirely exempted.³

Thanks largely to the work of his biographers, both medieval and modern, Alfred has become an immovable monolith, towering over the historical landscape not just of the ninth century, but of the whole Anglo-Saxon era. Discussions of almost any aspect of English history, literature or material culture in the final decades of the ninth century have tended to start and finish with him. Indeed, the view of Alfred as an 'eminent and illustrious Englishman', an almost messianic saviour of his country, a patriarch, a visionary, a warrior king, a devout

¹ George Godfrey Cunningham, *Lives of Eminent and Illustrious Englishmen from Alfred the Great to the Latest Times*, 7 vols, (Edinburgh and London, 1838), I, p. 36.

² David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688 in Eight Volumes, Illustrated with Plates* (London, 1754–61), I, p. 99.

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 91.

Christian, a defender of 'Anglo-Saxon Liberty'⁴ and an all-round good chap, that was constructed so fastidiously by his first biographer, Asser, has been inherited by successive generations of commentators and critics with, as Hume noted,⁵ remarkably little modification. By the time the Victorians (George Godfrey Cunningham amongst them) had finished with him, Alfred had assumed a position of unshakeable prominence in the popular pantheon as a martial hero, an assiduous scholar, a pious churchgoer, and a devoted champion of fair play; altogether, he had become a very English amalgam of William Ewart Gladstone, Rudyard Kipling, General Gordon and W. G. Grace.⁶ Subsequently, Alfred's fame, the accessibility of the sources which record his life and the emphasis placed on his reign in order to sell books and make undergraduate courses sound more attractive have combined to inspire an unusually rich and extensive corpus of scholarship on every aspect of his life and rule. Recently, David Pratt opened his study of Alfred's political thought by wondering, quite reasonably: 'is there anything left to say about King Alfred?'⁷

It is all the more striking then, that, for the diplomatic critic, Alfred's presence is rather less pervasive. In fact, the charters of Alfred's son, Edward 'the Elder', despite having been condemned by Stenton as 'unsatisfactory materials for history',⁸ actually constitute a much richer and more revealing corpus than Alfred's. Indeed, in a period dominated by a corpus of literature which was either all about Alfred, or had been commissioned by him, charters remain one of the best ways of obtaining an extra-Alfredian perspective on the final decades of the ninth century and the first years of the tenth. Certainly, charters were produced in Wessex under Alfred's auspices; in fact, there is good evidence to suggest that Alfred, continuing a process that had

⁴ On which see Julia Crick, 'Pristina Libertas: Liberty and the Anglo-Saxons Revisited', *TRHS* 6th series, 14 (2004): 47–71.

⁵ Hume, *The History of England*, I, pp. 95–6.

⁶ Victorian attitudes towards Alfred were discussed by Simon Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred', *ASE* 28 (1999): 225–356. Compare with Barbara Yorke, 'Alfredism: The Use and Abuse of King Alfred's Reputation in Later Centuries', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, Studies in Early Medieval Britain 3, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 361–80. The tendency to 'overpraise' Alfred was noticed and commented upon by, amongst others, Allen Frantzen, 'The Form and Function of the Preface in the Poetry and Prose of Alfred's Reign', in the same volume, pp. 121–36, at p. 121. The Victorian image of the Anglo-Saxons was itself based to an extent on the Elizabethan reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon past; and the perspective on the Anglo-Saxons that was available in the nineteenth century was shaped very much by the habits and interests of the antiquarians and collectors of the sixteenth and seventeenth, on which see Rebecca Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention of Anglo-Saxon England: Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde and the Study of Old English*, Studies in Renaissance Literature 30 (Cambridge, 2012).

⁷ David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge, 2007), p. 1.

⁸ Stenton, *Latin Charters*, p. 51.

been begun by his father, brought their production 'in house', placing responsibility for their drafting in the hands of a secretariat attached to the court.⁹ Yet, the corpus of late ninth-century West Saxon charters is comparatively small, full of forgeries and, from a literary perspective at least, not particularly interesting.

The Mercian diplomatic tradition of the ninth century, however, could scarcely be more different. A healthy, if not enormous, corpus of documents from Mercia, which were mostly preserved at Worcester,¹⁰ provides a tantalising insight into the workings of a parallel administration which, despite its political and military setbacks, clearly harboured an unusually vibrant culture of curial scholarship. Moreover, these documents provide a rare and precious glimpse of the impact that Mercian literary culture would have on the 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' during the reigns of Alfred and Edward. They reveal the extent to which the brains behind Alfred's cultural renaissance came not from Wessex, but from Mercia.¹¹ Indeed, the charters of Alfred and, much more so, of Edward resounded with 'Mercianness'; in their language, structure and style, they stubbornly refused to abandon the ambitious literary techniques which had been developed in Mercia over the ninth century and thus they announced the intellectual prowess of the Mercian faction, reminding anybody who read them that England was very much more than just a West Saxon project. Moreover, they provide a fascinating insight into the diversity and the inclusiveness of the Alfredian-Edwardian polity and, moreover, into its promotion of a political ideology in which Christian unity, informed by the unassailable precedent of an idealised view of the Anglo-Saxon past, was paramount. They also record the key moments in the evolution of the charter. Charters remained, of course, legal records of gifts or transactions; but, with their production now at least partly centralised, they reflected far more directly the

⁹ Dorothy Whitelock, 'Some Charters in the Name of King Alfred', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens, 2 vols (Collegeville, MN, 1979), I, pp. 77–98; and Simon Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and His Sons', *EHR* 109 (1994): 1109–49.

¹⁰ At the time of writing, the Worcester archive has not yet been edited in the British Academy series. However, a highly readable, if (inevitably) dated introduction to its contents can be found in Walter De Gray Birch, *The Anglo-Saxon Charters of Worcester Cathedral* (London, 1882).

¹¹ For an overview of Mercian identity in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, see Nicola Cumberledge, 'Reading between the Lines: The Place of Mercia within an Expanding Wessex', *Midland History* 27 (2002): 1–15; and Simon Keynes, 'Mercia and Wessex in the Ninth Century', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, Studies in the Early History of Europe, ed. Michelle Brown and Carol A. Farr (London, 2001), pp. 310–28; and 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage in Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1–47.

agenda of the king under whose direction they were produced. Just as Alfred had used the translations issued from his court to speak directly to his subjects (and, perhaps, to posterity), Edward used his charters to communicate the intellectual and political potency of his office to the kingdom's literate elite, broadcasting an unambiguous statement about Christian, Anglo-Saxon civilisation as an alternative to pagan, Viking chaos to all who would read them. As he did so, he set an important precedent which would be exploited to the full by his successors.

The 'Aldhelmian style' in the ninth century

It is clear that, during the ninth century, the single most consistently identifiable feature that distinguished 'good', or perhaps 'literary', Latin from the standard, work-a-day stuff that had dominated Anglo-Saxon charters for the last two centuries was the ability of a draftsman to imitate the work of Aldhelm. Usually, identifying this process in a particular charter is quite straightforward: where a draftsman quoted directly from Aldhelm's work, or seemed to paraphrase it, it is reasonable to assume that he was drawing deliberately upon it either first hand, or at some remove via a glossary or grammar. Given Aldhelm's celebrity, most draftsmen, even when they drew their Aldhelmisms from another source, would probably have been aware of whose work it was they were copying.

However, in some cases, things are more complicated. S 197 was written in 848 and subsequently preserved at Breedon-on-the-Hill. The Latin of its proem and sanction is overflowing with lengthy, poetic metaphors, obscure Graecisms and awkward circumlocutions. It all looks very Aldhelmian indeed. Yet, it contains only one possible quotation from the work of Aldhelm. Several other charters in the ninth century fall into the same category: the Latin is clearly being written in a more elevated register than normal, but an explicit link to Aldhelm is not always apparent. So, can this kind of Latin be classed as Aldhelmian, or is it just sophisticated?

To establish how intensely a particular draftsman was being influenced by Aldhelm, it is necessary to apply several tests. On the most obvious level, simply quoting from Aldhelm's work suggests a superficial link. This does not mean that the draftsman, even if he was aware that he was quoting Aldhelm, had studied Aldhelm's work in any depth, only that he was able to copy relevant parts of it, which may well have been excerpted at an earlier stage. Next, specifically Aldhelmian vocabulary may be identified: Aldhelm's use of language was such that many of the more *recherché* words he used, even after they had been recycled subsequently by other authors, seem to have

retained a distinctive relationship with his work.¹² Finally, even if a draftsman did not quote directly from Aldhelm or deploy vocabulary with an explicitly Aldhelmian pedigree, he may still have altered his style in such a way that it resembled Aldhelm's. Three stylistic techniques consistently characterised Aldhelm's writing, and are visible in even his more straightforward prose: hyperbole, hyperbaton and alliteration.¹³ Of course, Aldhelm was not the only author to have used such techniques; such was the extent of his influence on subsequent Anglo-Saxon authors, that, up to a point, these techniques became defining characteristics of Anglo-Latin more generally.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there were few writers who used hyperbaton, hyperbole and alliteration in combination to the extent that Aldhelm did. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that, where a draftsman who was working in a cultural context in which Aldhelm's work exercised a significant influence wrote Latin which combined the techniques of hyperbaton, hyperbole and alliteration, and also made use of deliberately obscure vocabulary (especially transliterated Greek), he was doing so in order to imitate Aldhelm to some degree. This, it seems, is just what the author of S 197 was doing; he was a good enough Latinist that he could, to an extent, disguise his debt to Aldhelm. But, on closer inspection, there is little doubt as to the ultimate source of his hyperbolic, highly alliterative prose, which abounds in obscure (sometimes distinctly Aldhelmian) vocabulary. In evaluating the extent to which Aldhelm's work lay behind the prose of charter draftsmen in the ninth and tenth centuries, these tests must be consistently applied.

Aldhelm in Mercia

Over the course of the ninth century, the Mercians developed an approach to drafting charters which was quite distinct from other, contemporary traditions, to which the work of Aldhelm was obviously fundamental. In 816, King Coenwulf of the Mercians gave some estates, mostly in Worcestershire, to Bishop Deneberht of Worcester. Such business was unremarkable in itself, but the language used in

¹² On which see Michael Winterbottom, 'Aldhelm's Prose Style and its Origins', *ASE* 6 (1977): 39–76; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, *passim*; and Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, *CSASE* 25 (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 132–225.

¹³ These are discussed in more detail below, pp. 101–3. On the particularities of Aldhelm's prose, see Winterbottom, 'Aldhelm's Prose Style'.

¹⁴ Alliteration, in particular, perhaps because of its prominent role in Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry, was an especially common feature of both Anglo-Latin verse and prose. See Michael Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), pp. 247–70; and Andy Orchard, 'Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story', *Anglia* 113 (1995): 429–63.

the charter which recorded it (S 180, 816, Worcester) most certainly was.¹⁵ For some reason, the draftsman, who was presumably based at Worcester, quoted not only the Book of Revelations (*qui est et qui erat et qui venturus est*), but also drew at least one phrase directly from the work of Aldhelm: *pantorum procerum prætorumque*;¹⁶ another phrase, *monarchia mundi*,¹⁷ is a possible quotation from Aldhelm, and another, *altithrono tonanti*, may have been drawn from Bede.¹⁸ The document also contains a good deal of alliteration, especially in its proem, which was extremely unusual in diplomatic Latin of this period. About thirty years later, in the 840s, another Worcester charter, S 205, alluded to Aldhelm's style again in its proem: *qui cunctam mundi monarchiam celsaque cæli climata*.¹⁹ Doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of S 205, so it is significant that its proem, including its Aldhelmian tag, appeared again twenty years later in a far more reliable document, S 210.²⁰ At about the same time, another charter, S 192, was written to record a transaction which took place at Tamworth. Subsequently preserved at Worcester, S 192 contains similar evidence of an ambitious literary style alongside allusions to the work of Aldhelm. S 193 and S 197 are more spectacular still. Composed

¹⁵ Another document, S 179, exists, recording a similar gift from Coenwulf to Worcester, which was written in very similar language. Its authenticity was doubted by Stevenson and Finberg, who thought it an eleventh-century forgery. However, the similarity of its formulae to those of S 180, which has generally been thought to be genuine (by Finberg, amongst others), suggests that it is partly authentic at least. On S 179 see W. H. Stevenson, 'Trinoda Necessitas', *EHR* 29 (1914): 689–703; and Finberg, *ECWM*, pp. 184–96. On S 180, see Finberg, *ECWM*, pp. 184–6; and Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (London, 1995), p. 285.

¹⁶ Exactly the same words are used in the same order in the opening line of Aldhelm's notoriously complicated *Epistola ad Heahfridum* (*Aldhelmi opera*, p. 488).

¹⁷ The phrase was used frequently by Aldhelm. See *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 649.

¹⁸ R. C. Love, 'The Sources of S 180', *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: A Register of Written Sources Used by Anglo Saxon Authors*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed October 2012. The same words were also used by Aldhelm.

¹⁹ The combination of these words, given their obvious associations, was not uncommon in the Middle Ages. However, Aldhelm used comparable phrases with some frequency. See *Aldhelmi opera* p. 570. In particular, Aldhelm used the words *caelum* and *climata* together twice, once in his verse *De uirginitate* (*Aldhelmi opera*, p. 464) and once in the prose version of the same work (*Aldhelmi opera*, p. 260).

²⁰ On this document, see Frank Stenton, 'The Supremacy of the Mercian Kings', *EHR* 33 (1918): 433–52, reprinted in his *Preparatory of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1970), ed. Doris Stenton, pp. 48–66, at p. 59 n. 3; Neil R. Ker, 'Hemming's Cartulary: A Description of the Two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A. xiii', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, ed. by Richard W. Hunt, William A. Pantin and Richard W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), pp. 49–75, at pp. 59 and 67–8; and Wendy Davies, 'Saint Mary's Worcester and the *Liber Landavensis*', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 4 (1972): 459–85, at pp. 471 and 476. However, Finberg considered that the charter at least had an authentic basis: see *ECWM*, no. 250. More work on the document is needed before it can be fully trusted. However, while the proem, in which the Aldhelmian features and unusual vocabulary are to be found, does look incongruous, it is not obviously spurious.

in 840 and 848 respectively and presumably preserved, in the first instance, at Breedon-on-the-Hill, ninety or so kilometres north-east of Worcester, the Latin style of these diplomas is far more sophisticated than that of any earlier charter, and there is no doubt that behind it lay a profound understanding of the work of Aldhelm. As well as making frequent use of alliteration, these documents include other typically Aldhelmian devices such as hyperbole and hyperbaton, alongside several likely quotations from or paraphrases of Aldhelm's work. Then, almost half a century later, in the 880s, two more documents – S 217 and S 346 – were composed, probably at Worcester, to record transactions taking place under the auspices of King Alfred. Like their predecessors, both contained ambitious, unprecedented vocabulary set amongst ostentatious, overtly Aldhelmian Latin.²¹ Undoubtedly, standards of learning and literacy remained very high indeed in parts of Mercia throughout the ninth century, and it was presumably for this reason that Alfred sent to Bishop Wærferth of Worcester for assistance in his programme of intellectual renewal.²²

A number of factors probably inspired this tendency. The hiatus in manuscript production, along with the pause in the composition of original Latin texts which occurred in the mid ninth century may be one: with fewer original texts being produced, learned scribes may well have felt that charters were their only opportunity to show off their literary ability, and so they adapted the language of these documents accordingly. In addition, the rivalry between houses for increasingly scarce resources might have encouraged them to compete with each other for the attention of the king by showing off the scholarliness of their communities. Whatever the reasons for their Latin style, these charters demonstrate unambiguously that Aldhelm's work was available in ninth-century Mercia and, moreover, that it was being read, understood, paraphrased and even imitated there. Its use in charters was not exactly commonplace, but nor was it so unusual as to be atypical. Most probably, the use of Aldhelmian Latin was recognised in ninth-century Mercia as representing a 'superior' way of writing. Switching into a literary register informed by Aldhelm's work was a conscious decision on the part of the draftsman designed to impress upon his audience (to whom the charters may well have been recited in the first instance, which would have maximised the impact

²¹ I have discussed these Mercian charters elsewhere: see Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings'.

²² Wærferth contributed a slightly inelegant translation of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* to Alfred's translation project, on which see, amongst others, Malcolm Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred: The Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*', in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Jane Roberts, Janet L. Nelson and Malcolm Godden (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 35–53.

of techniques such as alliteration)²³ his own intellectual achievements and, perhaps more importantly, the scholarliness of his community.²⁴

Aldhelm in Wessex and Kent

No ninth-century charter preserved in any West Saxon archive, recording the gift of any West Saxon king, comes close to demonstrating the sustained use of sophisticated language or deep understanding of Aldhelm that was typical of the Mercian documents. That is not to say, however, that the charters issued by King Æthelwulf and his sons in the ninth century were devoid of any stylistic interest or, for that matter, that their authors were ignorant of the work of Aldhelm. Table 1 lists the likely and possible quotations from the work of Aldhelm in charters issued by Æthelwulf, Æthelbald, Æthelberht, Æthelred and Alfred, and preserved in the archive of a West Saxon or Kentish house (S 217 and S 346 are not included because of their Mercian provenance).

Table 1

Quotation in charter	Quotation in Aldhelm	S number, king, date, archive
felicitas fallentis vite	fallentis vitae felicitas (<i>De metris</i>)	S 292, Æthelwulf, 842, Glastonbury
altithroni regis	altithronum regum (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 293, Æthelwulf, 843, Christ Church, Canterbury S 319, Æthelwulf, 844?, Christ Church, Canterbury S 297, Æthelwulf, 845, St Augustine's Canterbury
labentis sæculi prosperitas	labentis mundi prosperitas (<i>De metris</i>)	S 300, Æthelwulf, 850, St Augustine's, Canterbury S 301, Æthelwulf, 850, Malmesbury S 326, Æthelbald, 860, Shaftesbury
ornamenta huius mundi	mundi ornamenta (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 300, Æthelwulf, 850, St Augustine's, Canterbury S 301, Æthelwulf, 850, Malmesbury S 326, Æthelbald, 860, Shaftesbury

²³ On the audience of charters, and on their performance see pp. 66–9 below.

²⁴ See Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings'.

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celestis patrie	celestis patrie (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> and <i>Epistola ad Gerontium</i>)	S 300, Æthelwulf, 850, St Augustine's, Canterbury S 301, Æthelwulf, 850, Malmesbury S 326, Æthelbald, 860, Shaftesbury
penetralia cordis	penetralia cordis (verse <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 332, Æthelberht, 863, Christ Church, Canterbury S 339, Æthelred, 868, Rochester
regnans in sedibus altissima	regnans in sedibus altis (verse <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 332, Æthelberht, 863, Christ Church, Canterbury S 339, Æthelred, 868, Rochester
dicione gubernans	dicione gubernans (<i>Enigma</i> 100, verse <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 332, Æthelberht, 863, Christ Church, Canterbury S 339, Æthelred, 868, Rochester
ineffabili rerum	ineffabili rerum (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 341, Æthelred, 869, Glastonbury
tempestatum turbines	tempestatum turbines (<i>Epistola ad Gerontium</i>)	S 354, Alfred, 878×899, Old Minster, Winchester
litterarum apicibus	litterarum apicibus (<i>De metris</i> , <i>De uirginitate</i>)	S 354, Alfred, 878×899, Old Minster, Winchester

Whilst steps were certainly being taken by the West Saxon court to centralise charter production at this time, scribes from Canterbury or Rochester still seem to have been employed when the court was in Kent.²⁵ It is immediately striking, then, that the geographical distribution of the archives in which these charters were preserved is markedly biased towards Kent. With the exception of S 341 and S 354, even those preserved in the archive of a West Saxon house have a distinctly Kentish flavour: S 292, which was preserved at Glastonbury, recorded a transaction which took place during a meeting held at *Andredesdune*, which was probably in the Weald, in Kent;²⁶ S 301 and S 326 (preserved at Malmesbury and Shaftesbury) were strongly associated with, and used formulae from S 300, which granted land in Kent and was preserved at St Augustine's, Canterbury.²⁷ Only S 341 (issued by Æthelred in 869 and preserved at Glastonbury) and S 354 (issued by Alfred and preserved at the Old Minster, Winchester) have no explicit

²⁵ Keynes, 'West Saxon Charters', p. 1110.

²⁶ Keynes 'West Saxon Charters', p. 1115 n. 2. The impression is strengthened by the presence of Ceolnoth, archbishop of Canterbury, in the witness list, which he attests above the king. He rarely attested charters which had no connection to Kent.

²⁷ Kelly, *St Augustine's*, p. 85; and *Shaftesbury*, pp. 17–19.

connections with Kent. Significantly, the extant charters of Æthelwulf and his sons are distributed fairly equally across a range of archives from all over Kent and Wessex. Therefore, the association with Kent of those charters containing quotations from the work of Aldhelm cannot easily be put down to an accident of transmission. This pattern may suggest, therefore, that the habit of quoting Aldhelm was a Kentish trait which influenced West Saxon diplomatic practices from the late 860s. In itself, this is quite interesting. Conventional wisdom holds that standards of Latinity in Kent were very poor indeed in the late ninth century.²⁸ A series of ninth-century Kentish draftsmen were unfortunate enough that the texts they wrote survived long enough to be pilloried by Michael Lapidge.²⁹ Perhaps these occasional reminiscences of Aldhelm record the outcome of a conscious attempt being made by somebody to improve poor educational and scribal standards in Kent.

Indeed, the way in which Aldhelm's work was used in these charters would certainly support the idea that the individuals who were charged with adapting it for diplomatic purposes may not have fully understood what they were doing. In Mercia, draftsmen made comparatively frequent and sustained use of Aldhelm's work, going so far as to imitate his style directly in their own writing. There is every reason to believe that they had access to and were reading Aldhelm first hand, and that they sought to adapt their own literary style accordingly.³⁰ The relationship that the draftsmen of Kent and Wessex had with Aldhelm was much more superficial. First of all, it is worth noting that the 'Aldhelmisms' in the Kentish and West Saxon material are not unambiguous quotations. The phrases used are short, consisting usually of only two words, which are sophisticated, certainly, but not particularly obscure or exotic; none of the

²⁸ The extent to which learning declined is controversial. Nicholas Brooks and Michael Lapidge argued that, in the main, educational standards in England had indeed sunk very low in the middle of the ninth century: see Nicholas Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: The Crucible of Defeat', *TRHS* 5th series 29 (1979): 1–20; and Michael Lapidge, 'Latin Learning in Ninth-Century England', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*, pp. 409–54. Jennifer Morrish and Helmut Gneuss have put forward a more nuanced interpretation: see Jennifer Morrish, 'King Alfred's Letter as a Source on Learning in England in the Ninth Century', in *Studies in Earlier English Prose*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Binghamton, NY, 1986), pp. 87–107; and Helmut Gneuss, 'King Alfred and the History of Anglo-Saxon Libraries' in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton and Fred C. Robinson (Toronto, 1986), pp. 29–49. Nicholas Brooks revisited the subject in 2013, and re-emphasised the collapse of literacy at ninth-century Canterbury, in particular: see 'Latin and Old English in Ninth-Century Canterbury', in *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular in the Earlier Middle Ages*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 24, ed. Mary Garrison, Arpad P. Orbán, Marco Mostert and Wolfert S. van Egmond (Turnhout 2013), pp. 113–32.

²⁹ Lapidge, 'Latin Learning', especially pp. 446–54.

³⁰ Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings'.

words used here had an obviously Greek or Hebrew heritage³¹ (as was the case with the vocabulary preferred by the Mercian draftsmen) and none was unique to Aldhelm. In fact, most were comparatively common and would certainly not have seemed all that unusual, let alone challenging, to even a moderately practised Latinist. This seems odd. The whole point of Aldhelm's prose (and, more so, of his verse) was to baffle the reader with complex syntactical arrangements and exotic vocabulary. If a ninth-century draftsman had gone to the trouble of reading, say, the prose *De uirginitate*, or tormented himself working through the letter to Heahfrith, it seems quite illogical that he would have chosen such ordinary, even asinine quotations with which to ornament his own prose. In Mercia, Aldhelm's work was used to show off, to associate the charter and its draftsman unmistakably with the grandiloquent intellectual achievements of Anglo-Saxon England's most bombastic Latinist. Seizing on such platitudes as *celestis patrie* or *ornamenta huius mundi* does little to accentuate the impact of the draftsman's Latin, and it certainly does not do justice to Aldhelm's own style. If anything, it makes the abbot of Malmesbury's work seem rather quotidian.

It is possible that such mundane language was used by these draftsmen because their own limited standard of Latin meant that they were themselves incapable of understanding, let alone adapting, anything more impressive.³² It is very likely, moreover, that they were drawing these phrases from a glossary behind which, perhaps at some remove, lay Aldhelm's work.³³ Indeed, the nature of the 'Aldhelmisms' in this corpus of documents tends to support such a conclusion. Importantly, none was unique to Aldhelm. The phrase *penetrabilia cordis*, for example, was comparatively common: Aldhelm certainly did use it, but so, amongst others, did the fourth-century poet, Faltonia Betitia Proba (from whom Aldhelm likely acquired it), and so did her rough contemporary, Juvenecus. Likewise, *celestis patrie* was used by such ecclesiastical celebrities as Bede (in his *Historia ecclesiastica*) and Pope Gregory (in his *Dialogues*); the word *altithronus* was also used by Bede, and *ornamenta mundi* by no less a figure than

³¹ The word *sabaoth* was used in several West-Saxon–Kentish charters of the later ninth century. However, despite its Hebrew origins, its use in the Vulgate (for instance: Jeremiah 11:20; Romans 9:29) would surely have removed much of its exoticism.

³² See above, n. 28.

³³ Many Anglo-Saxon glossaries were compiled in such a way that their source texts, if not explicitly acknowledged (which they sometimes were), could often be identified quite easily. It could well have been the case, therefore, that these draftsmen would have known whose work they were quoting. On the compilation of Anglo-Saxon glossaries, see Michael Lapidge, 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899*, pp. 149–50; Jessica Cooke, 'Worcester Books and Scholars, and the Making of the Harley Glossary', *Anglia* 115 (1997): 441–68; and Patrizia Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*, Variorum Collected Studies (Aldershot, 1999), *passim*.

Virgil. None is so distinctive, outlandish or arcane that it can stand as unassailable proof of a direct link between these charters and the work of Aldhelm. Rather, the uniform brevity and relative simplicity of these phrases are consistent with the use of a glossary.

The evidence of S 332, issued by Æthelberht in 863 and preserved in the archive of Christ Church, Canterbury, confirms this impression further. The charter survives as an original single sheet, and so it is possible to obtain a rare glimpse of the writing process in action. Importantly, its proem contains a striking concentration of ‘Aldhelmisms’ (underlined here):

In nomine trino diuino regi regnanti inperpetuum Domino Deo
hsabaoth cui patent cuncta penetralia cordis et corporis terrestria simul
et celestia necnon super ethera regnans in sedibus altis ima et alta
omnia sua dicione gubernans cuius amore et eternis premiis

The same proem, identified by Nicholas Brooks as a typical Canterbury formulation,³⁴ was recycled in S 339, which was written in 868 and preserved at Rochester. The performance of the draftsman of the later charter, however, is significantly better than that of the unfortunate individual who wrote S 332. In S 332, the phrase *ethera regnans in sedibus altis ima* appears; *altis ima* makes little sense³⁵ and is likely a misreading of *altissima* (‘highest’), which is the word used in S 339, the Rochester charter. Clearly, the draftsman of S 332, whose poor Latin Michael Lapidge found particularly vexatious,³⁶ has misread and misunderstood his exemplar. Similarly, the word *hsabaoth* (*sabaoth* in S 339) may suggest the draftsman was taking a dictation, or that he was reading a passage from his exemplar and then copying it down, either of which scenarios could have led to the incongruous ‘h’ at the start of the word. Either way, it seems very unlikely indeed that a scribe whose Latin was so weak would have been able to understand Aldhelm’s prose even if he could read it first hand, let alone adapt it for his own purposes. It is much more likely that the draftsmen of S 332 and S 339 shared an exemplar (presumably some kind of formulary or set of notes) which contained the quotations from Aldhelm.

Overall, what this evidence does *not* tell us is much clearer than what it does. It does not mean that the work of Aldhelm was being widely circulated in Wessex; and it does not mean that Kentish draftsmen, working in an area where standards of Latinity had clearly slipped a

³⁴ Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (Leicester, 1984), pp. 169–70.

³⁵ The contrasting meanings of *altis* and *ima* may have led to the confusion. *Altissima* is preferable in the context. It is worth noting that the word in Aldhelm’s verse *De uirginitate* is *altis*, not *altissima*.

³⁶ Lapidge, ‘Latin Learning’, p. 451.

very long way indeed since Aldhelm himself had been a pupil there in the seventh century, were reading and imitating his work anything like as consistently or with as much skill as their Mercian counterparts were. It may, however, mean that glossaries or formularies which drew on Aldhelm's work were available in Kent, and that, when the court was nearby, they were consulted by those charged with producing the king's charters. It is even possible that a formulary of some kind, which drew on Aldhelm's work, had been compiled in Kent by one of the more literate members of the communities at Canterbury or Rochester specifically to address the problem of poor Latinity (although no such document survives, sadly).³⁷

More significantly, perhaps, the way in which these phrases were absorbed into West Saxon diplomatic practice by the end of the 860s may tell us something important about the porous nature of that tradition. Clearly, West Saxon draftsmen were open to new ideas: the traditional formulae and procedures which typified native, West Saxon diplomatic were not immutable but instead were constantly evolving in response to external stimuli. Altogether, the Kentish impact on West Saxon diplomatic in the ninth century was, unsurprisingly, quite subtle; the effect that the Mercians would have upon it at the beginning of the next century would be rather more conspicuous.

A Mercian draftsman in Wessex

The final years of the ninth century and the first decades of the tenth saw, in theory, the end of the Mercian diplomatic tradition. As Mercia and Wessex became ever closer, united under the rule of a single king under whose auspices functioned a more or less formalised writing

³⁷ Official formularies designed to aid the production of legal documents do not seem to have appeared in England until after the Conquest: see Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 50 (Cambridge, 2003). However, legal formularies certainly existed on the continent in the early Middle Ages: see Alice Rio, *The Formularies of Angers and Marculf: Two Merovingian Legal Handbooks*, Translated Texts for Historians 46 (Liverpool, 2008). Given the consistency with which formulae were recycled in the ninth and tenth centuries, there must have been Anglo-Saxon formularies of some kind, designed to preserve and transmit diplomatic formulae, even if they were no more than informal sets of notes. Comparable collections of epistolary formulae were fairly common in the early Middle Ages, including in Anglo-Saxon England: see, for instance, Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental* (Turnhout, 1970); and Malcolm Richardson, 'The *Ars dictaminis*, the Formulary, and Medieval Epistolary Practice', in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia, SC, 2007), pp. 52–66. And there is even some evidence that literary formularies may have been in use in medieval Ireland: Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History 30 (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 200–2.

office,³⁸ so the need for a local, Mercian diplomatic mechanism decreased. Records of two sales of land made (probably) in 914 and 915 by Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians,³⁹ have the distinction of being the last extant charters to have been issued in Mercia by a 'local' Mercian ruler. However, the vibrant diplomatic tradition which had flourished so spectacularly in Mercia during the ninth century did not disappear; far from it, in fact. Rather than respectfully bowing out of the historical record in favour of its far more sensible and restrained West Saxon cousin, the flamboyant Mercian diplomatic style, complete with its linguistic tildes, Aldhelmian tags and general air of liberated, literary posturing, mingled with the West Saxon way of doing things to produce a kind of diplomatic hybrid. The influence of the Mercians was subtle at first: an Aldhelmism here, or a bit of hyperbole over there, slipped in almost as if the (Mercian?) draftsman hoped that his (West Saxon?) supervisor would not notice. By the 920s, however, any pretence was dropped altogether, as Anglo-Saxon charter draftsmen took the stylistic innovations of the ninth century to completely new and extraordinary levels. The charters of the 890s and early 900s preserve valuable glimpses of the earliest stages of this transformation.

Simon Keynes identified several 'Mercian' characteristics (including a combined blessing and sanction following the witness list, proems extolling the advantages of using written documents for recording grants, etc.) appearing in charters issued by Alfred and his son, Edward; perfectly logically, Keynes equated these features with the 'presence of Mercian priests at King Alfred's court'.⁴⁰ These Mercians brought another important element of their native diplomatic tradition with them: a certain penchant for paraphrasing Aldhelm. Dating from 891 and 892 respectively, S 347 and S 348 are two closely related charters from the archives of Glastonbury and Wilton. Keynes suspected, with good reason, that they were 'produced by the same agency'; moreover, he thought it likely that the agency in question was Mercian.⁴¹ The earlier document, S 347, is rather brusque and contains little of stylistic note. S 348, however, is a little more ambitious in its language: the proem reads *In nomine domini ego Ælfrædus altithroni cuncta creantis ac gubernantis concedente clementia anglosaxonum rex.*

³⁸ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1147–8.

³⁹ S 224 and S 225 were preserved at Burton and Abingdon respectively. The dating of these documents is problematic, and neither text seems perfect. Both documents seem likely to record a genuine transaction, however, and probably preserve a significant proportion of original material.

⁴⁰ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', p. 1137.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1136. Keynes noted the presence of the Mercian priest Wærwulf in the witness list of S 348. It is tempting to suppose that he was the author.

The alliteration on 'c' is immediately obvious. Beyond that, Aldhelm used the word *altithronus* as an epithet for God frequently,⁴² and the phrase *cuncta creantis* also has Aldhelmian overtones.⁴³ The Latin style of this charter is not extravagant exactly, and it is nothing like as bold as that of, say, S 193 and S 197, but it does suggest a more literary approach to drafting charters than was usual. Importantly, these traits continued into the early 900s, suggesting that the influence of the Mercian style on Anglo-Saxon diplomatic practices survived Alfred's death. Examining the six earliest documents to survive from Edward's reign, all of which date from 900 and 901, Keynes considered that S 359, possibly S 362, S 363, the proem of S 364, S 366 and S 1205 showed evidence of Mercian formulation.⁴⁴ Significantly, each of these charters also contained verbal reminiscences of the work of Aldhelm.

Not every 'Aldhelmism' in these charters is a certain quotation or paraphrase by any means. The phrase *vitae curriculum*, for instance, had been used by plenty of other authors besides Aldhelm and was hardly an unusual method of expressing a common idea. What this table does demonstrate, however, is that, while Edward's charters were not literary masterpieces exactly, their Latinity contained some sophisticated and ambitious characteristics. The overall sense is that the rather terse diplomatic style that was typical of pre-Alfredian, West Saxon charters was maintained, but was being highlighted by a certain quantity of Mercian flamboyance.

There is an important difference, moreover, between the vocabulary being used here, which looks sophisticated, even poetic, and the very much more mundane words which featured in the West Saxon and Kentish charters of the second half of the ninth century. A clear definition exists in the mind of any Latinist between prose and poetry. In the Middle Ages, this definition was so pronounced that 'poetic' Latin acquired, to an extent, its own vocabulary,⁴⁵ and there

⁴² *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 560. The word *altithronus* had a history in Mercian (and, to a lesser extent, West Saxon) diplomatic stretching back to the beginning of the ninth century. Bede also used the word.

⁴³ Aldhelm used the phrase *cuncta creavit* in his *Enigma XCI*: *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 139. Also, the words *concedens* and *clementer* appear in close proximity, amongst an alliterating pattern based on 'c', in lines 494–5 of the verse *De uirginitate*: *Aldhelmi opera*, p. 373.

⁴⁴ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1141–3. Keynes also discussed S 365. While this charter may not be an outright forgery, its text looks to be corrupt and so it has not been considered here. See Whitelock, 'Some Charters', p. 93 n. 21; and Miller, *New Minster*, no. 4.

⁴⁵ Harry M. Hine, 'Poetic Influence on Prose: the Case of the Younger Seneca', in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose*, Proceedings of the British Academy 129, ed. Tobias Reinhardt, Michael Lapidge and James N. Adams (Oxford, 2006), pp. 211–38. See also Carin Ruff, 'The Perception of Difficulty in Aldhelm's Prose', in *Insignis sophiae arcator: Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Michael Herren on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Gernot R. Wieland, Carin Ruff, and Ross G. Arthur (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 165–77. Compare with Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2014).

Table 2

S number and date	Archive	Phrase in charter	Phrase in Aldhelm	Other
S 359, 900	Old Minster, Winchester	de summo celi apice	ex summa caelorum arce <i>De metris</i> (Aldhelmi opera, p. 67).	S 359 uses the distinctly poetic word <i>decescente</i> . As well as having been used twice by Aldhelm, <i>decesco</i> had been used only once before in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, in S 197.
		uite semper curriculo	vitae curriculo Prose <i>De uirginitate</i> (Aldhelmi opera, p. 294).	
S 362, 901	Old Minster, Winchester	altitonantis mundi satoris	sator et mundi regnator Verse <i>De uirginitate</i> (Aldhelmi opera, p. 455)	This is the first appearance of <i>sator</i> , a poetic and strongly Aldhelmian epithet for God, in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. S 362 also contains other rare or poetic vocabulary, such as <i>altitonantis</i> , <i>cautissima</i> and <i>caligosa</i> .
S 363, 901	Malmesbury	in loco ubi ruricoli nominant Wulfferdinleh		The word <i>ruricoli</i> (which was used three times by Aldhelm) was used only in Mercian diplomatic prior to 900. Its earliest use in a certainly authentic document was in S 178, a charter of Coenwulf from 815.
S 364, 901				See below.
S 366, 901	New Minster, Winchester	diuino inflate spiramine	Sacro spiramine plenus <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i> IV.X and verse <i>De uirginitate</i> (Aldhelmi opera, pp. 29 and 369).	The word <i>spiramen</i> had been used only once before in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, in S 346.

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		fumi similitudine euanescunt	Ut fumus evanescens Prose <i>De</i> <i>uirginitate</i> (Aldhelmi <i>opera</i> , p. 295)	
S 1205, 901	Malmesbury	Ordlaf Meldunensi cenobio		Used nine times by Aldhelm, the word <i>coenobium</i> (or some form thereof) appears in several more or less authentic charters (S 71, S 149, S 256, S 260, S 301 and S 363), all of which are closely associated with Malmesbury.
		Ubi ruricolae Choellewrthe vocitant		See above (S 363).

is every reason to think that, from the seventh century onwards, the Anglo-Saxons had a developed sense of what was poetic and what was not. For instance, inceptive verbs (those marked with the infix -sc-, such as *decescente* in S 359 or *euanescunt* in S 366) were considered poetic, as were nouns ending in -amen (such as *spiramen* in S 366).⁴⁶ It seems unlikely that the draftsmen of these charters selected such vocabulary by chance.

The most interesting of all these documents, however, is S 364. Its proem reproduced, with a few small additions, that of S 197, the famous Breedon charter. The royal styles of these charters are also extremely similar. Clearly, the author of S 364, who was probably also the author of S 362 (901, Old Minster, Winchester),⁴⁷ had significant literary ambitions. The more pressing questions, though, are how and why did a draftsman writing a charter for King Edward at Axminster in Devon in 901 come to reproduce the text of a charter from Breedon-on-the-Hill which had been written half a century earlier?

It is unlikely that the complex language of S 197 could have been reproduced so precisely from memory. Therefore, the text of the earlier document was very probably in front of the draftsman of the latter, and was being copied directly. S 197 survived in the cartulary of Peterborough Abbey. In 900, however, Peterborough was situated well

⁴⁶ Michael Lapidge, 'Poeticism in Pre-Conquest Anglo-Latin Prose', in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose*, ed. Reinhardt, Lapidge and Adams, pp. 321–37.

⁴⁷ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', p. 1143.

within the Danelaw. While there may well have been ecclesiastical continuity there on some level, it is hardly likely that a charter from Breedon would have been taken there at the height of the Viking raids, and then a copy somehow smuggled out in time for it to be copied in Axminster in 901.⁴⁸ It is far more likely that Breedon's cartulary had been taken to Worcester where S 193 (the sibling of S 197) survived, and that it was this action which brought Breedon's unusually sophisticated diplomatic style to the attention of our draftsman.

Perhaps more important is the issue of why a charter from a comparatively little-known foundation in the name of a king whose reign was something less than glorious should have been used as a model for one of Edward's charters. Undoubtedly, it was the extraordinary Latin style of S 197 rather than its historical context that made it appealing. Thus, the copying of its proem and royal style is likely to have been a deliberate act designed to recreate the prose of S 197 in particular, rather than a random reworking of whatever formulae happened to be at hand. In other words, the draftsman of S 364 used S 197 as a model because he wanted to convey his meaning in a Latin style that was sophisticated and challenging. Clearly, like his Mercian predecessors, he recognised the potency of using such an elevated style in a charter. When set against the broader picture of the increased use of poetic and Aldhelmian language in the charters of Edward's reign, it becomes clear that Anglo-Saxon diplomatic procedures were undergoing a subtle but significant change in the first decade of the tenth century.

Charters and the king's voice

Before going on to discuss how and why Aldhelm's work was being used in this way, it is first necessary to consider how the production, purpose and reception of the charter were changing by the time of Edward's accession. It is probably fair to say that, prior to the ninth century, no Anglo-Saxon king had been able to exert complete, sustained control of written communications with his subjects. Indeed, the lack of any extant, royal 'decrees' may suggest that, prior to the eleventh century at least, Anglo-Saxon kings generally ran their kingdom orally rather than routinely dispatching written orders to their agents in the provinces.⁴⁹ The survival of a handful of pre-tenth-century law codes and the occasional letter to an Anglo-Saxon king from a pope,

⁴⁸ On the pre-Conquest history of Peterborough Abbey, see Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 2–60.

⁴⁹ Elsewhere in Europe, kings circulated written decrees as a way of communicating their wishes to their subjects: see, for instance, Hans Hummer, *Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe: Alsace and the Frankish Realm, 600–1000* (Cambridge, 2005). See also the

or from an Anglo-Saxon king to a foreign ruler (the letters from King Offa referred to by Charlemagne in his own correspondence being the most striking, perhaps), implies that they could communicate when they needed to, but there is no reason to think that they did so very much.⁵⁰ Anyway, these documents are often so formulaic that they can hardly be taken as a genuine record of the actual utterances of the king. One cannot help but wonder whether, in the case of Offa, the king's language might not have required a little cleaning up before being committed to vellum and dispatched to Aix-la-Chapelle.

Prior to the ninth century, charters, which were certainly the most long-lived form of communication between an Anglo-Saxon king and the localities, were composed by convenient ecclesiastics whose primary concern it was to record the legal details of a given transaction. It was very common for Anglo-Saxon kings to appear to 'speak' in the first person in charters. In S 8, the earliest, extant Anglo-Saxon charter that is certainly authentic, the proem opens with the phrase, *ego Hlotharius rex Cantuariorum*, 'I, Hlothere, King of the Cantwara'. Henceforth, virtually every charter issued in England contained a similar formula. Before the ninth century, though, the king had relied upon an ecclesiastical scribe to 'speak' for him in his charters. Even if he was literate, which is by no means certain, he would have had comparatively little control over what his charters said or how they said it. In some cases, charters were probably not even drawn up at the court: rather, the details of the transaction might have been noted down and referred to the scriptorium of a convenient foundation for writing up at a later date. Whilst it is perfectly possible that, every now and then, an Anglo-Saxon king might have found a way to exert his influence over some unfortunate scribe when it came to inventing a suitably over-the-top royal style, these occasions were probably fairly rare.⁵¹

By the early tenth century, however, the king had found his voice. There is little doubt that, in Edward's reign, charters were being

relevant essays collected in *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe: 950–1350*, ed. Robert F. Berkhofer III, Alan Cooper and Adam J. Kosto (Aldershot, 2005).

⁵⁰ For Charlemagne's letter see *EHD*, no. 197. He mentioned that Offa had sent him several letters. Perhaps the most famous example of a papal letter to an early Anglo-Saxon king is that from Gregory the Great to the newly converted Æthelberht of Kent, which was recorded by Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I.32.

⁵¹ The best example of this is the bizarre style adopted by Æthelbald of Mercia in S 89, *rex Britanniae*. It is hard to believe that Æthelbald himself, or one of his lieutenants, had not had some role to play in the creation of so ambitious a style. This style has, understandably, inspired a wealth of scholarship: for instance, Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the *Gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, Studies presented to John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129. On the debate over exactly how, and in how many stages, charters were usually produced, see pp. 67–8 below.

produced by scribes attached to the royal court, who presumably wrote them whilst they were in attendance on the king, before the charters were shipped off to whatever archive was most convenient.⁵² Simon Keynes identified several sets of documents issued during Edward's reign which, despite their having been written at different times and preserved in different archives, and recording transactions in favour of different individuals, display such formulaic and procedural similarities to suggest convincingly that they were the work of the same draftsman.⁵³ A particularly interesting group is formed by S 1284 (900, Old Minster, Winchester), S 359 (900, Old Minster, Winchester), S 368 (903, Wilton), S 373 (904, Old Minster, Winchester), S 374 (New Minster, Winchester), and S 1286 (904, Old Minster, Winchester). Various formulaic and stylistic similarities unite the charters of this group, the most striking of which is the repetition of words of the Nicene Creed, *omnia uisibilia et inuisibilia* in their proems. As with the groups identified by Keynes, it seems likely that the same draftsman was responsible for writing these charters.⁵⁴ At any rate, if local production prevailed into the tenth century, it became the exception rather than the rule. The upshot of all this, of course, was that Edward, who almost certainly possessed a reasonable standard of literacy,⁵⁵ could, to some extent, control directly what his charters said and, more importantly, how they said it.

Edward was therefore continuing the practices established by his father. By the standards of an Anglo-Saxon ruler, Alfred was an almost obsessive communicator.⁵⁶ He did not just use charters to speak to his

⁵² The arrangement is clearly described by Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters'.

⁵³ Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters', pp. 1143–5.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that one, particularly striking, common denominator of these charters is ealdorman Ordlafe (see Ordlafe 1 in *PASE*). S 368 and 1284 are both grants to Ordlafe himself; he attested the rest in his usual position at the head of the list of *duces*. Ordlafe was a powerful, and apparently literate, magnate during the first part of Edward's reign, who is perhaps best known for his association with the Fonthill Letter, which he may have authored himself. It is tempting to wonder whether this set of charters might have been produced, if not by him, then at least by somebody in his retinue. If he were literate, then he may at least have had a hand in drafting the formulae. On the Fonthill Letter and its authorship, see Simon Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture presented to Helmut Gneuss* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53–97; and Mechthild Gretsch, 'The Language of the Fonthill Letter', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994): 23–102. Both considered that Ordlafe might have had a direct role in the composition of the text. In contrast, see Mark Boynton and Susan Reynolds, 'The Author of the Fonthill Letter', *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 91–6, where Ordlafe's role has been questioned.

⁵⁵ Edward, although not the most highly educated of Alfred's children, received some tuition, according to Asser: *Vita Alfredi*, ch. 75: Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, ed. and trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 90.

⁵⁶ On which see Susan Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Rosamund McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 36–62; and Simon Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon

subjects, though. Literary texts, works of political philosophy, exegesis, law and pastoral advice were all issued from his court, usually in the vernacular, and almost always prefaced with a statement of intent written from the perspective of the king himself. Even if Alfred was not actually the author or the translator of every one of these works,⁵⁷ it is reasonable to presume that the intended effect was to project the king's personal views on history, politics and religion into the consciousness of England's literate elite and, thereby, to promote his particular agenda of educational, religious and political renewal in the minds of the people upon whom he depended to carry it out.

By the time Edward ascended to the throne, Alfred had set a vitally important precedent. Now, a king communicated directly not only with those subjects who were in attendance at his court, but also with the great and the good further afield. In the communications which issued from the royal court (of which charters, if their patterns of survival are anything to go by, were probably the most carefully preserved and, therefore, highly valued), he spoke in his own voice. He could do this because he was literate enough to have at least some idea what his charters said;⁵⁸ and because, for the first time, those charters were routinely being produced by a scribe who was present at the court.

How Aldhelm saved England: charters and the ideological resistance

It is reasonable to presume, therefore, that the content of Edward's charters was, to a certain extent, centrally controlled. Even if Edward, or more likely a trusted courtier, were not fastidiously scrutinising every single word, the gist of what was said (and, importantly, the style in which it was expressed) could be, and very probably was, subject to a degree of central control. This makes the use of Aldhelm in Edward's charters, and the act of recycling the proem of S 197 in S 364, all the more significant. These were not random acts. Rather, it

England', in the same volume, pp. 226–57. For a more general view, see Matthew Innes, 'Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society', *Past and Present* 158 (1998): 3–36. Also: Pratt, *The Political Thought*, especially pp. 78–82.

⁵⁷ There is some debate as to the extent of Alfred's involvement in the translations which have come to be associated with him. See Malcolm Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?' *Medium Aevum* 76 (2007): 1–23; and 'The Alfredian Project and Its Aftermath: Rethinking the Literary History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2009): 93–122. Janet Bately's response to Godden is informative: 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009): 185–215.

⁵⁸ It may even have been the case that the texts of these charters reflected in some way the procedures of a donation ceremony, or that they were read out to the court when the transaction was made. See pp. 66–9 below.

seems likely that they were part of a planned, coherent programme intended to broadcast a specific message of political unity and intellectual superiority to the kingdom at large. It has been noted that Alfred, in the translations that were issued from his court at the end of the ninth century, developed 'an English prose style responsive to intellectual demands'.⁵⁹ In the same way, it is possible that Edward, in the early 900s, was developing an English diplomatic style which responded both to England's new political circumstances and to the new arrangements for charter production that had been put in place by his predecessors. By incorporating Mercian expertise and Mercian traditions, it took full advantage of the high standards of learning and literacy that clearly prevailed in the midlands; but this must also have had the additional benefit of satisfying the prominent Mercian faction within the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons. Beyond this, however, in their language and style, Edward's charters also, at times, referred back to the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age'. As they did so, they sent an important and unambiguous message about the political and intellectual character of Edward's England.

Now, as in the ninth century, 'retro' is cool. In *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, David Lowenthal described the origins and development of a widespread contemporary trend, visible in the architecture, culture, music and popular imagination of the late twentieth century, for resurrecting the past: 'beleaguered by loss and change', he wrote, 'we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability [...] mourning past neglect, we cherish islands of security in seas of change'.⁶⁰ Such comments are every bit as relevant, if not even more so, in the context of Edward's reign. There is no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons were, at this time, undergoing a dramatic social, political, cultural and economic transformation. Thus, the memory of the Anglo-Saxon past, and of the achievements of the 'Golden Age' in particular, must have seemed very welcome as one of these 'islands of security'.

Alfred, in constructing a new political system, used the past almost like an instruction manual. Not only did it give him models to which to adhere, but it also had immense propaganda value. Each of the new, vernacular works of law, history, philosophy and theology that were produced at the end of the ninth century at Alfred's behest⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bernard F. Huppé, 'Alfred and Ælfric: A Study of Two Prefaces', in *The Old English Homily and Its Background*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard F. Huppé (Albany, NY, 1978), p. 119. Compare with Kathleen Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Post-Colonial Thinking about the Nation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 611–37.

⁶⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2003), p. 6.

⁶¹ See n. 57 above.

conveyed, in its own way, a similar message: that for the Anglo-Saxon state to succeed, it must recreate the glories of the past, both biblical and Anglo-Saxon. Alfred's law code is a good example of this. Clearly an exercise in image-making designed to invoke biblical precedents,⁶² the code's lengthy prologue opens with an Old English translation of Exodus 20–23, and, amongst further biblical translations, its tone approaches exegesis.⁶³ Very significantly, juxtaposed with these passages were the laws of King Ine of Wessex (688–726),⁶⁴ prefaced by a prologue written, as usual, from Alfred's own perspective, which began: *Ic ða Ælfred cyning þas togædere gegaderode 7 awritan het, monege þara þe ure foregengan heoldon* ('Then I, King Alfred, gathered these [laws] together, and commanded to be written down many of those which our ancestors had').⁶⁵ Alfred's point was unambiguous. 'As always', Milton Haight Turk wrote, well over a century ago, Alfred 'gathered from the past to make good for the future'.⁶⁶ Much the same point was made, more or less, in the other texts issued from his court.⁶⁷ Alfred himself (presuming, for the moment, that the text expressed his sentiments, even if he did not necessarily write it),⁶⁸ in his prose preface to his translation of the *Cura pastoralis*, articulated the following:⁶⁹

⁶² Patrick Wormald, 'Lex scripta and verbum regis: Legislation and Germanic kingship from Euric to Cnut', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. Peter H. Sawyer and Ian N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 105–38; and *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*. Volume 1, *Legislation and Its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 416–29; Pratt, *The Political Thought*, especially pp. 216–17; and Bryan Carella, 'Asser's Bible and the Prologue to the Laws of Alfred', *Anglia* 130 (2012): 195–206.

⁶³ David Pratt discussed Alfred's purpose in some detail in *The Political Thought*, especially p. 215.

⁶⁴ Reference to Ine's laws also had a dynastic purpose: in his preface to the law code, Alfred acknowledged Ine as his kinsman (a relationship that was also reflected by the genealogical material reproduced in the A-text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).

⁶⁵ Frederick L. Attenborough, ed. and trans., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 62–3.

⁶⁶ Milton Haight Turk, *The Legal Code of Ælfred the Great* (Boston, MA, 1893), p. 44.

⁶⁷ On which see Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 55–100. It seems reasonable to suggest that the texts issued from Alfred's court maintained a coherent and consistent interest in various aspects of the Anglo-Saxon past. However, it is possible to overstate this point: see George Molyneux, 'The Old English Bede: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?' *EHR* 124 (2009): 1289–323.

⁶⁸ The extent to which Alfred himself was involved in the prefaces which so often seem to be written in his voice was discussed by Frantzen, 'The Form and Function'. See also Malcolm Godden, 'The Player King: Identification and Self-Representation in King Alfred's Writings', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. Reuter, pp. 137–52.

⁶⁹ For more on Alfred's literary relationship with the Anglo-Saxon past, see Nicole Guenther Discenza, 'The Persuasive Power of Alfredian Prose', in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford, 2005), pp. 122–35.

ondðecyðan hate ðæt me com swiðe oft on gemynd, hwelce wiotan iu
wæron giond Angelcynn, ægðer ge godcundra hada ge woruldcundra;
ond hu gesæliglica tida ða wæron giond Angelcynn⁷⁰

and he [Alfred] wishes it to be known that it very often comes to mind
what wise men there were formerly throughout England, both of sacred
and of secular orders; and how there were happy times throughout
England

It is clear that Alfred's vision for his new England was driven, to a significant extent, by reference to the past. Historical and biblical examples provided him with paradigms of proper behaviour, both religious and secular, upon which he could call in constructing England's new moral and political character.⁷¹ While the voice in which Alfred spoke was unprecedented, the ideas he expressed, and the words he used to express them, were firmly rooted in the unassailable precedents of the Anglo-Saxon past.

The culture of the Anglo-Saxon past, moreover, was probably more widely understood in the 900s than it had ever been. In Mercia, Aldhelm's work had long since been pressed into service by charter draftsmen, and there is no particular reason to think that this expertise did anything other than expand under the influence of Alfred's reforms. Moreover, manuscript copies of Aldhelm's work were certainly available in England at this time.⁷² Edward's draftsmen clearly knew what they were doing when they quoted Aldhelm or recycled the proem and royal style of S 197. Moreover, the audience of the charters they wrote, which was presumably made up mostly of the kingdom's secular and religious elite, would likely have been impressed by such language. At a time when literacy had become much more than a matter of personal pragmatism,⁷³ some of them, perhaps even a majority, would likely have realised that the origins of such a style lay in the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age' and, in doing so, implicitly make an association between Edward's court and the

⁷⁰ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse* (Oxford, 1967), p. 4.

⁷¹ Alfred certainly was not the first medieval king to look to the past, or to the Old Testament, for ideas about how to rule. For a Europe-wide discussion of this matter, which sets Alfred's reign in its broader context, see Paul Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power, and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011).

⁷² Alfred's biographer, Asser, was clearly inspired by Aldhelm's Latin. Moreover, a late ninth-century manuscript containing Aldhelm's prose *De uirginitate* survives from Worcester: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Harley 5.f.iii. See Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 241 (Tempe, AZ, 2001), no. 462, p. 81.

⁷³ On the importance and uses of literacy at this time, both secular and religious, see Mechthild Gretsch, 'Literacy and the Uses of the Vernacular', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2013), pp. 273–95.

intellectual culture of the past, the same culture upon which Alfred had placed so much emphasis in the 880s and 890s. Alfred made the Anglo-Saxon past fashionable; Edward utilised the potency of its greatest Latinist in his charters in order to demonstrate the intellectual achievements of his court, and impress his subjects.

Yet, there was probably also an important political dimension to this. Arguably, the greatest problem that faced both Alfred and Edward was one of unity. For all that the Vikings were fearsome soldiers, and for all that the Anglo-Saxons' efforts to resist them were not always terribly effective, the Vikings' victories were not always won on the battlefield.⁷⁴ On the contrary, Viking armies actually suffered a string of notable military reverses both in England and on the continent over the course of the ninth century. They were tough, certainly, but not unbeatable. Rather, their real strength lay in their mastery of deception and in their ability to identify and to exploit the political, social and dynastic fault lines dividing the polities with which they collided.⁷⁵

Thanks, in part, to the enthusiasm of the West Saxon compilers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for making the Mercians look bad, this process appears more clearly in Mercia than anywhere else in England. Here, dynastic squabbling became a serious problem in the ninth century. One king, Wigstan (840), was deposed and murdered. The king who usurped his position, Beorhtwulf (840–52), was badly defeated by the Vikings in 851, losing control of the lucrative port of London in the process. Apparently unable to raise sufficient capital in these straitened circumstances, he began confiscating the Church's lands, somewhat to the annoyance of the clergy.⁷⁶ In the face of ever more damaging Viking incursions, Beorhtwulf's successor, Burgred, simply gave up and retired to Rome in 874, leaving the kingdom of the Mercians in the hands of the unfortunate Ceolwulf, the 'foolish king's thane', who, thanks to the somewhat partisan account of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, has been known ever since as a Viking

⁷⁴ On which see Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, The Medieval World (London, 1998); and 'From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the Late Anglo-Saxon State', in *The Normans and Their Adversaries at War: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Hollister*, ed. Richard Abels and Bernard S. Bachrach (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 15–30. See also Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age*, Warfare in History (Woodbridge, 2012).

⁷⁵ Simon Coupland has documented this phenomenon in ninth-century Frankia: 'The Carolingian Army and the Struggle against the Vikings', *Viator* 35 (2004): 49–70. Similar themes were explored in an Anglo-Saxon context by Simon Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS* 5th series, 36 (1986): 195–217.

⁷⁶ The differences between West Saxon and Mercian attitudes towards monastic landholding at this time have been discussed by Robin Fleming, 'Monastic Lands and England's Defence in the Viking Age', *EHR* 100 (1985): 247–65. On the political fragility of the Mercian state in the ninth century, see Keynes: 'Mercia and Wessex'.

quisling.⁷⁷ However, the Mercians' will to resist the Vikings was not broken by any cataclysmic military collapse: within just a few years of their capitulation, Mercian armies were on the offensive against the Vikings and the Welsh, and were achieving notable military successes on both fronts. Clearly, the capacity of Mercian military institutions to function both independently and in coalition with the West Saxons was not significantly diminished by the events of the 870s.⁷⁸ Moreover, the administrative, cultural and political centres of the Mercian kingdom at Worcester, Lichfield and Tamworth remained virtually untouched by the Vikings. In contrast, Winchester, which lay at the heart of the West Saxon kingdom, had been sacked in 860; in 871 the Vikings were at Reading, then Basingstoke, then as far west as Wilton; in 877, they were at Wareham and then Exeter, and so on. Indeed, throughout the 870s and early 880s, Wessex suffered far more penetrating and sustained Viking raids than were ever launched successfully against central Mercia. Rather than a massive military disaster, then, it seems to have been weak leadership, a catastrophic failure of morale and general loss of resolve that undermined Mercian resistance to the Vikings.⁷⁹ The kingdom, which was in the first place little more than a loose coalition of peoples around the banner of a more or less powerful overlord,⁸⁰ simply disintegrated under prolonged external pressure.

Neither Alfred nor Edward could have been ignorant of the reasons for the Mercians' collapse. Indeed, the fragility of the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons itself became all too apparent in the immediate aftermath of Alfred's death when Æthelwold, Alfred's nephew, rebelled, enlisting the help of the East Anglian Vikings as he did so. They, no doubt, were delighted to have a chance of exploiting a West Saxon dynastic

⁷⁷ ASC, s.a. 874.

⁷⁸ See Gareth Williams, 'Military Institutions and Royal Power', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Brown and Farr, pp. 295–309, especially 306–8; compare with Steven Bassett, 'Divide and Rule? The Military Infrastructure of Eighth- and Ninth-Century Mercia', *EME* 15 (2007): 53–85.

⁷⁹ Despite the intervening millennium, the implosion of the Third Republic in 1940, particularly as seen through the eyes of a medievalist, makes for a fascinating comparison: Marc Bloch, *L'étrange défaite: temoignage écrit en 1940* (Paris, 1946).

⁸⁰ 'Ethnicity' and 'identity' are problematic concepts at the best of times, but are especially tricky in the context of ninth-century England. On the question of Mercian identity, see (amongst others): Barbara Yorke, 'The Origins of Mercia', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Brown and Farr pp. 13–22; Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, MN, 2003), ch. 4; and Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Emergence of English Identity, 700–1000', in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 24–52. A progressive and engaging discussion of the development of Mercian political and cultural identity can be found in Alex Burghart, 'The Mercian Polity, 716–918' (unpublished PhD thesis, King's College London, 2007).

squabble.⁸¹ Both Alfred and Edward knew very well that defeating the Vikings in the long term required something more than just mastery of the battlefield; it meant giving the English something to fight for; it meant creating a shared identity where none had existed before. Any victory would need to be ideological as well as military.

For Edward, this was where the past came in handy. The successes of the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age' were something to which the Anglo-Saxons, whether Mercian or West Saxon, Northumbrian or East Anglian, could all relate more or less equally. Aldhem was an especially good example: a West Saxon with apparent royal connections,⁸² he had studied in Kent and had presided over a foundation at Malmesbury which straddled the traditional border between Wessex and Mercia, and had probably been in the territory of rulers of both kingdoms at different times in its history.⁸³ In more recent memory, moreover, the Mercians had very much made Aldhelm their own, making skilful use of his prose in their charters throughout the ninth century. That Edward's draftsmen attempted something similar cannot have failed to send a clear message of Anglo-Saxon unity to anybody who would hear or read their charters: a king from a West Saxon dynasty who used Mercian formulae and procedures in his charters, and, while he was about it, sprinkled a few well-chosen Aldhelmisms over the top for good measure. There were few better ways to broadcast the message that 'West Saxon' and 'Mercian' were outdated concepts. What mattered now was the survival of a single, Anglo-Saxon kingdom, which traced its intellectual heritage to a shared 'Golden Age' in the seventh and eighth century. The idea was a compelling one, and it clearly worked, because Edward's kingdom held together long enough for it to be inherited by his son, Æthelstan, who took the use of charters as statements of political ideology to a new level altogether.

Conclusion

The charters of Edward 'the Elder', far from being 'unsatisfactory materials for history', are amongst the most important documents to have emerged from the court of any Anglo-Saxon king. Not only do they record a unique moment of administrative union between

⁸¹ On Æthelwold's rebellion, see Ryan Lavelle, 'The Politics of Rebellion: The *Aetheling* Aethelwold and West Saxon Royal Succession, 899–902', in *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History*, ed. Patricia Skinner (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 51–80.

⁸² Michael Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007): 15–69.

⁸³ See Kelly, *Malmesbury*, pp. 1–19; also Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), pp. 60–2.

Wessex and Mercia, when Mercian and West Saxon draftsmen began to collaborate to produce documents which made studied use of aspects of each others' language and traditions; but, much more than that, they illuminate perfectly the charter's transition from straightforward legal document to grand statement of royal authority. Edward could control how his charters looked, and so he could use them to present himself in a certain light. The king, as seen through his charters, was a powerful and learned monarch, whose speech resounded with divine authority, and was scattered with allusions to the intellectual brilliance of the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age'. He was not a West Saxon or a Mercian, but an Anglo-Saxon whose multicultural court was clearly reflected in the language of the documents that emerged from it. In the early 900s, these traits were expressed subtly. Edward was no *frimeur*. His son, Æthelstan, however, most certainly was. Edward, using a diplomatic mechanism that had been installed by his father, projected a message of political unity based on examples drawn from the Anglo-Saxon past to all who would read his charters; Æthelstan inherited both the writing office and the idea that the past was a 'good thing' from Edward and Alfred, but he got none of Edward's subtlety. In the 920s, Æthelstan's scribes were engaged in the production of charters which were genuinely spectacular in their language, style and ambition. The documents they wrote were, stylistically and politically far in advance of anything produced by Edward or Alfred; but without their groundwork, without the renewed interest in the Anglo-Saxon past that had been fostered by Alfred, and without the emphasis that Edward placed upon it in order to promote his vision of political unity, the remarkable charters of Æthelstan's reign would probably have looked very different indeed.

Æthelstan

In 937, just half a century after Alfred had been forced to flee into the marshes of the West Country after his forces had been overrun at Chippenham, his grandson, Æthelstan, scored a stunning victory over an alliance of Scots, Vikings and Strathclyde Britons at the Battle of Brunanburh, consolidating his position as *Rex*, not just *Anglorum*, but also, as his charters had been keen to remind their audience since the late 920s, *totius Britanniae*. It is fair to say that most of what we know about Æthelstan, from the composition of his court down to his daily itinerary, we only know because his charters tell us. At a time when the usual narrative sources became strangely threadbare, charters went in the opposite direction, providing an unparalleled annual record of where Æthelstan was, who was there with him, and what they were all doing. Moreover, they give us a unique understanding of how the king interpreted his office and of how he required it to be interpreted by others.

Perhaps it was because of the instability of Æthelstan's early years, the controversial nature of his accession and the hostility towards him that lingered in Wessex, that he established himself as king so emphatically at the end of the 920s. For him, the office of king became something it had never truly been before.¹ No longer was he a king amongst kings. Now, Æthelstan was *the* king, the only king, ordained by God to rule not only amongst his people, but also over his nation and, much more importantly, over the island of Britain. His charters became the principal vehicle by which that message was disseminated.

However, Æthelstan was only able to put his charters to work as ideological tools because of the specific circumstances of their production. Throughout his reign charters were routinely produced by a royal writing office over which the king, or at least his public relations department, had direct control.² For this reason, Æthelstan's

¹ Changing concepts of kingship in the tenth century make for a complex topic which has attracted much attention: see, for instance, David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural and Ecclesiastical Renewal*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History 3 (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 141–71, especially pp. 148–9; also, Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England*, Yale English Monarchs Series (New Haven, CT, 2011), ch. 2.

² See below, pp. 59–60.

charters were inspired directly by the culture of his court, where their draftsmen were based. The result was spectacular, to say the least. From a cultural perspective, the 920s and 930s were certainly some of the most exciting times of the whole Anglo-Saxon era. As scholars from all around Western Europe flocked to England, bringing with them manuscripts and books containing exciting and challenging new texts, so Æthelstan's court came to resemble a literary *salon*, with the king himself at the centre of the new and vibrant intellectual milieu. Æthelstan likely had a personal role to play in this: his Mercian upbringing would have brought him into contact with the book collections and educational infrastructure of western Mercia, which had remained more or less undamaged by the Vikings, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that, as a result, he was unusually well educated by contemporary standards.³ Significantly, Æthelstan's charter draftsmen seem to have shared his interests. Conventional wisdom holds that, in response to the flourishing literary culture of Æthelstan's court, the Anglo-Saxon charter underwent radical and dramatic changes during his reign (had the phrase not already been pressed into service for an altogether different purpose, one might almost be tempted to call it a 'diplomatic revolution').⁴ The charter certainly did change: the laconic legal platitudes and formulaic procedural language which had characterised much Anglo-Saxon diplomatic since the seventh century were replaced by a spectacular display of obscure vocabulary, lurid imagery, extensive and unnecessary circumlocutions and a whole range of literary, even poetic, devices which, in combination, lent his charters an altogether new sense of intellectual accomplishment. The draftsman known as 'Æthelstan A', who was responsible for composing almost half of Æthelstan's extant charters, was the undisputed master of this style. However, the extent to which these changes were truly radical, let alone original, can be called into question. It is arguable that Æthelstan's charters, rather than becoming something new and progressive, were in fact, just like Edward's, the product of a powerful, centrally controlled attempt to invoke the culture of the Anglo-Saxon past and, in doing so, to associate the king with the 'Golden Age' of the seventh and eighth centuries.

³ Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 35.

⁴ Cf. Geoffrey Elton, *England under the Tudors*, A History of England 4 (3rd edn, London, 1991), p. 94.

The chancery

Before discussing Æthelstan's charters themselves, it is first necessary to say something about the nature of their production. In short, it is no longer possible to construct a viable, effective and credible argument against the existence of a centralised, royal writing office during Æthelstan's reign.⁵ The evidence that, in Æthelstan's reign and afterwards, charters (and other documents necessary for the governance of the kingdom, such as letters and perhaps even poems) were, with a few exceptions, drawn up centrally by a scribe or scribes attached to the court, before being distributed to whatever monastic archive was to house them, is overwhelming.⁶ Throughout the latter half of the 920s and the 930s, charters composed in favour of different individuals and preserved in the archives of different houses were clearly and consistently related to each other. Sometimes they were written by the same hand; more often, they shared strong procedural and formulaic links which simply could not have been achieved had they been produced locally and independently.

Two documents from either end of Æthelstan's reign may be exceptions to this rule. The first, S 394, dates from September 925, the same month that Æthelstan was consecrated king. Extremely short and quite unlike any of Æthelstan's other diplomas, not least because of its strange orthography, this document may, according to Michael Lapidge, have been drafted by a continental, possibly Saxon scribe.⁷ However, the document's most recent editor, Susan Kelly, expressed significant and justified doubts about the charter's authenticity (and, for this reason, it has not been included in the following corpus of Æthelstan's charters).⁸

The second exception, which is more troublesome, is S 444. Composed in 938, a year before Æthelstan's death, it records a grant of two estates in Hampshire to the Old Minster, Winchester, with the additional statement that they should remain under the bishop's control. It is much shorter than most of Æthelstan's charters and contains none of the obscure vocabulary that was so typical of them. Its whole Latin style, in fact, is nothing like as sophisticated as that

⁵ Centralised production in the 920s and 930s was demonstrated by Keynes, *Diplomas*, ch. 2. For a response to Keynes's arguments, see Pierre Chaplais, 'The Royal Anglo-Saxon "Chancery" of the Tenth Century Revisited', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. H. C. Davis*, ed. Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (London, 1985), pp. 41–51.

⁶ The most recent summary of the arguments can be found in Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 49–51.

⁷ Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Athelstan', in *ALL*, pp. 49–86, at p. 56 n. 74 and p. 85 n. 159.

⁸ Kelly, *St Augustine's*, pp. 100–3.

used elsewhere in the corpus, and is even rather clumsy in places. Its formulae, too, are odd. The proem (*plerumque divitum huius seculi quia timore divino neglecto infirmiores quosque paternis hereditatum ruribus expellunt etiam et ecclesiarum Dei possessiones invadunt ni privilegiorum fortis eis obstet auctoritas*) is unique in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, and the sanction is also unusual. Furthermore, it has the distinction of being the only (apparently authentic) extant grant from Æthelstan to any Winchester house. If this charter is authentic, which is not certain by any means,⁹ then it seems unlikely that it was produced by Æthelstan's chancery. It may have been drawn up at Winchester as a response to an informal decree from the king which could have been conveyed orally; it may have been produced to replace a document that had been lost; or, most likely, it could be a forgery, perhaps a contemporary forgery prompted by unease at the prevailing mistrust between Æthelstan and Winchester.

S 394 and S 444 apart, though, it seems safe to presume that Æthelstan's charters were produced by draftsmen who travelled with the court. These individuals were probably ecclesiastically trained and may have been detailed to the king from their native foundations, to which they could have returned at the end of their tenures. Even with limited evidence for secular literacy,¹⁰ it is hard to believe that anybody other than an ecclesiastic, or at the very least somebody with an ecclesiastical training, would have been capable of producing the highly sophisticated Latin of Æthelstan's charters. Whether the draftsmen were or had been ecclesiastics, though, does not seem to matter very much in the larger scheme of things. What is important is that, with charters being produced 'in house' at the court, the king could control what they looked like. The chancery, then, was crucial in transforming the nature, audience and purpose of the Anglo-Saxon charter.

The corpus

Roughly seventy-four charters purport to be grants of King Æthelstan. There are, however, a great many spurious and semi-spurious documents amongst their number, alongside a quantity of interpolated texts in later documents which may preserve authentic formulae

⁹ Cyril Hart considered it authentic in 1970 (although he did not discuss its authenticity at length), but it awaits the scrutiny of a BACS editor. See Cyril Hart, 'The Codex Wintoniensis and the King's Haligdom', in *Land, Church and People: Essays presented to Prof. H. P. R. Finberg*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Reading, 1970), pp. 7–38.

¹⁰ On which see Patrick Wormald, 'The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and Its Neighbours', *TRHS* 27 (1977): 95–114.

from Æthelstan's reign. Overall, thirty-eight of these documents are either authentic or contain enough authentic material to make them useful subjects of analysis. They fall, more or less, into three, unequal chronological phases.¹¹ The first phase covers the first two years of Æthelstan's reign, 925 and 926, from which three charters (S 395, S 396 and S 397) are extant. Then, there is nothing until 928, when the agency known as 'Æthelstan A' took over responsibility for producing Æthelstan's charters. 'Æthelstan A' worked from 928 until 934 and the charters he produced constitute a second phase. Finally, from 935 until the end of Æthelstan's reign in 939 a steady stream of grants was issued at a rate of several each year, making up the third and final phase. An agency known as 'Æthelstan C' was likely responsible for at least one of these.¹²

It is immediately obvious from Table 3 that Æthelstan was a prolific grantor of land. This is by far the greatest number of charters issued hitherto by a single Anglo-Saxon king. As always, accidents of transmission may account for this, at least in part. However, the high number of charters extant from Æthelstan's reign could also be connected to the underlying instability of the kingdom he inherited. Under Edward, the kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons had expanded rapidly, incorporating new areas of the Midlands and north where the English 'liberators' would not necessarily have been warmly welcomed by all. Æthelstan therefore inherited an awkward and unstable powerbase; as well as facing potential opposition in newly conquered areas of the Danelaw, Æthelstan was also far from universally popular in Wessex. At the same time as he became king in Mercia, his half-brother, Ælfweard, was chosen as king in Wessex. Although Ælfweard's convenient death sixteen days later ensured Æthelstan's accession to a united kingdom, resentment towards him seems to have lingered in the south, particularly at Winchester.¹³ It is possible that, against this background, Æthelstan sought to guarantee the loyalty of important figures within the kingdom by distributing land: the three earliest extant grants of Æthelstan's reign, from 925 and

¹¹ This rather subjective approach to organising Æthelstan's diplomas is purely chronological. Simon Keynes grouped them according to their formulae; see Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 44.

¹² For a full set of references on each charter, see Peter Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, Guides and Handbooks 8 (London, 1968); and, for a more up-to-date bibliography, see www.esawyer.org.uk. See also David Woodman's corpus of 'Æthelstan A' diplomas: "'Æthelstan A'" and the Rhetoric of Rule', *ASE* 42 (2013): 217–48, at pp. 247–8; and below, pp. 88–90.

¹³ See Simon Keynes, ed., *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester: British Library Stowe 944: together with leaves from British Library Cotton Vespasian A. VIII and British Library Cotton Titus D. XXVII*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 26 (Copenhagen, 1996), pp. 19–22; and Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 40;

Table 3

S number, archive	Date and place of issue	Details	Notes
S 395, Burton	925	Æthelstan grants land at ?Whittington? (?Derbyshire?) to Eadric, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 396, Abingdon	926	Æthelstan grants land at Chalgrave and Tebworth (Bedfordshire) to Ealdred, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 397, Burton	926	Æthelstan grants land at Hope and Ashford (Derbyshire) to Uhtred	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 399, Glastonbury	16 April (Easter Day) 928, Exeter	Æthelstan grants Ælfflæd twenty hides at Winterburna (place uncertain, but possibly Winterbourne, near Bristol)	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 400, Old Minster, Winchester	16 April (Easter Day) 928, Exeter	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at Odstock (Wiltshire), to Byrhtferth, his minister.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 403, Selsey	3rd April 930, Lyminster	Æthelstan grants four hides at Medmerry with woodland at Earnley and Meadow outside Chichester (Sussex) to Beornheah, bishop of Selsey.	Basically authentic, but partially rewritten to include fuller details of woodland and meadow. ^a Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 405, Exeter, ex Crediton	29 April 930, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants Eadulf, bishop of Crediton, and his familia three hides at Sandford (Devon).	Extant in MS from s. x/xi. Although some material is likely to have been fabricated, the charter may have an authentic basis. ^b Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 412, Winchester, Old Minster	23 March 931, Colchester	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Ecchinswell (Hampshire) to Ælfric.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 413, Abingdon	20 June 931, Worthy	Æthelstan grants twenty hides at Watchfield (Berkshire) to Ælfric, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.

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S 1604	15 July 931	Grant of land at <i>Bultheswithe</i>	Heavily abbreviated, but seems to preserve significant elements of an 'Æthelstan A' charter.
S 416, Winchester, Old Minster	12 November 931, Lifton	Æthelstan grants nine hides at Ham (Wiltshire) to Wulfgar, his minister.	Preserved as an original, single sheet. No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 417, Winchester, Old Minster	30 August 932, Milton	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at West Meon (Hampshire) to Æthelgeard (or Æthelweard), his minister.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 418a, Barking	9 November 932, Exeter	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Bowers Gifford (Essex) to Beorhtsige.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 418, Winchester, New Minster	24 December 932 Amesbury	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at North Stoneham (Hampshire) to Alfred, his minister.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 419, Shaftesbury	24 December 932, Amesbury	Æthelstan grants eleven and a half hides at Fontmell (Dorset) to Shaftesbury Abbey.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 379, Winchester, New Minster	11 January 921 (for 933), Wilton	'Edward' grants land at Collingbourne Kingston (Wiltshire) to Wulfgar, his minister.	Probably an authentic charter of 'Æthelstan A' which has been made to look like it was issued by Edward 'the Elder'.
S 422, Sherborne	26 January 933, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Bradford Abbas (Dorset) to the familia of Sherborne minster.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 423, Sherborne	26 January 933, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants five or eight hides at Stalbridge Weston (Dorset) to the church of Sherborne	Basically authentic, but several suspicious features. ^c Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 425, Canterbury, Christ Church	28 May 934, Winchester	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at ?Durrington? (?Sussex?) to Ælfwald, his minister.	Preserved as an original single sheet. No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.

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S 407, York	7 June 934, Nottingham	Æthelstan grants land at Amounderness (Lancashire) to the church of St Peter at York.	An authentic basis but there is evidence of tampering. ^d Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 426, Glastonbury	13 September 934, Buckingham	Æthelstan grants fifteen hides at ?Kington St Michael? (?Wiltshire?) to Æthelhelm, his minister.	No reason to doubt authenticity. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 458, Wilton	924×39	Æthelstan grants twenty hides, at Chilmark (Wiltshire) to Wulfsige, his minister.	Incomplete diploma. No reason to doubt authenticity, but the extant material is insufficient for an accurate judgement. Product of 'Æthelstan A'.
S 411, Abingdon	935×938	Æthelstan grants land at Farborough (Berkshire) to Ælfheah, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 429, Shaftesbury	935	Æthelstan grants land at Tarrant Hinton (Dorset) to Shaftesbury	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 430, Winchester, Old Minster	935	Æthelstan leases land at Havant (Hampshire) to Wihthgar, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity
S 431, Glastonbury	936	Æthelstan grants land at Marksbury (Somerset) to Æthelhelm, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity, although the boundary clause may be post-Conquest.
S 432, Athelney	937	Æthelstan grants land at Lyng (Somerset) to Athelney	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 437, Thorney	937	Æthelstan grants land at Water Newton (Huntingdonshire) to Sigulf	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 438, Wilton	937	Æthelstan grants land at Burcombe (Wiltshire) to Wilton	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 441, Winchester, Old Minster	938	Æthelstan grants land at Rimpton (Somerset) to Æthelred, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 442, Glastonbury	938	Æthelstan grants land at Uplyme (Devon) to Æthelstan, his comes	No reason to doubt authenticity.

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S 444, Winchester, Old Minster	938	Æthelstan grants land at Tichborne and Beauworth (Hampshire) to Bishop Ælfheah, decreeing that the land will remain under episcopal control	Very unusual formulation. If genuine, then possibly locally produced.
S 445, Shaftesbury	939	Æthelstan grants land at West Orchard (Dorset) to Beorhtwyn	Formulation is unusual, possibly interpolated. ^e
S 446, Winchester, Old Minster	939	Æthelstan grants land at Droxford (Hampshire) to Eadburh, his sister	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 447, Canterbury, Christ Church	939	Æthelstan grants land at Meopham (Kent) to Eadwulf, his minister	No reason to doubt authenticity. The text survives as an original single sheet in the hand of 'Æthelstan C'.
S 448, Abingdon	939	Æthelstan grants land at Brightwalton (Berkshire) to Eadwulfu, a nun	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 449, Winchester, Old Minster	939	Æthelstan grants land at East Overton (Wiltshire) to Wulfswith, probably a nun	No reason to doubt authenticity. The text survives as an original single sheet and may have been produced by a colleague of 'Æthelstan C'.
S 455, Muchelney	934*939	Æthelstan grants land at Curry Rivel and Stowey in Fivehead (Somerset) to Muchelney	Text is entered in a gospel book. Probably authentic, but some doubts have been expressed. ^f

^a Kelly, *Selsey*, pp. 74–7.

^b Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 43 n. 74.

^c O'Donovan, *Sherborne*, pp. 29–33; and Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 307.

^d Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 44 n. 78; and 'Regenbald the Chancellor [sic]', p. 186 n. 4.

^e Kelly, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 41–3.

^f Pierre Chaplais, 'The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 39 (1966): 1–34, at p. 5.

926, were all made to secular individuals, all of whom may have been powerful noblemen, rather than to religious institutions.

S 395 disposed of a reasonable estate of seven hides, possibly outside Chesterfield in Derbyshire,¹⁴ to one Eadric; this could be the

¹⁴ The location of the *Hwituntune* being granted has been disputed: see Sawyer, *Burton*, p. 5.

same Eadric who continued to appear regularly on charter witness lists well into the reign of Æthelstan's half-brother and successor, Edmund.¹⁵ S 396, which was drawn up in the same year, disposed of a similar-sized estate in Bedfordshire to Ealdred, who may be the same Ealdred who attested charters as a *dux* in the early 930s.¹⁶ Uhtred, who received a large estate of sixty hides in Derbyshire in S 397, was also probably a significant landowner who continued to appear in witness lists on and off until 959.¹⁷ The caveat here, of course, is that any attempt to make a certain identification of these individuals on the basis of what is, at best, extremely sparse information is fraught with problems. What is fairly certain, though, is that the three earliest charters from Æthelstan's reign disposed of significant estates in the Danelaw to individuals with English names who, if their identifications are sound, enjoyed considerable influence over the course of their subsequent careers and were likely to have been staunch Æthelstan loyalists. The longevity of these individuals suggests that they were relatively young at the beginning of Æthelstan's reign which, in turn, may indicate that Æthelstan was using grants of land as a way of promoting a new, powerful, loyal and, most importantly, non-West-Saxon elite.

Beyond this, the corpus is informative insofar as it illustrates the regularity with which Æthelstan granted land. With the exceptions of 927 and 929, at least one (and usually more than one) charter survives from every year of Æthelstan's reign. Most of the estates he granted were in the old, West Saxon shires of Dorset, Devon, Wiltshire and Hampshire, but it is interesting to note the disposal of estates further afield in Lancashire, Derbyshire, Bedfordshire and Essex. It is also interesting that, with the exception of S 444, Æthelstan did not add directly to the endowments of any of the three Winchester houses (the Old and New Minsters, and the Nunnaminster). Frithustan, bishop of Winchester (909–31), did not attest any of Æthelstan's charters until 928 (S 400), when he was relegated to fourth position amongst the bishops, beneath those from Lichfield, Sherborne and Wells, which was unlikely to have pleased him. The feeling of resentment fostered towards Æthelstan at Winchester, then, seems to have been mutual.

The changing role of the charter

More can certainly be said about the distribution of Æthelstan's charters and about their utility as tools of political manipulation.

¹⁵ See 'Eadric 8' in *PASE*.

¹⁶ See 'Ealdred 25' and 'Ealdred 28' in *PASE*.

¹⁷ See 'Uhtred 6' in *PASE*.

However, there is no doubt that their most extraordinary characteristic is their Latin. Their vocabulary brimming with Graecisms, neologisms and archaisms, their language punctuated with hyperbolic overstatements, their syntax dispersed by the frequent use of hyperbaton and highlighted by sophisticated alliterating patterns, Æthelstan's charters were composed in a Latin style which was amongst the most erudite, sophisticated and ambitious ever written in England. On the face of it, all this looks very new and progressive: it seems, at first, as though Æthelstan presided over a wholesale reinvention of the Anglo-Saxon charter, clearly turning it into a vehicle of compelling, royal propaganda, with its new, enormous physical appearance, new Latin style, new script (known as square minuscule) and new royal styles.¹⁸ On closer inspection, however, although some new characteristics certainly did develop at this time, Æthelstan's charters may not have been as original as they appeared. Primarily, they never lost their utility as legal documents. Without exception, Æthelstan's charters contained all the necessary legal mechanisms (boundary clause, dispositive section and so on), all written in straightforwardly comprehensible Latin, to ensure that the transaction was enacted properly and that the charter performed its intended task. Beyond this, though, it is arguable that the greatest impact of Æthelstan's charters lay not in their capacity to appeal to their audience's sense of novelty, but, on the contrary, in their ability to appeal to the Anglo-Saxons' powerful attachment to their own history. They are, in many respects, really very conservative documents indeed. In order to understand why Æthelstan's charters came to look the way they did, however, it is first necessary to appreciate the process by which they were composed and, moreover, what happened to them afterwards. For while their primary, legal role remained unchanged, their subsidiary uses and target audience certainly did evolve in Æthelstan's reign and this, more than anything, seems to have governed the way they came to look.

The process of making the grant itself was almost certainly tied up with some kind of 'formal ceremony marked by highly visible rituals', to borrow Susan Kelly's phrase.¹⁹ Some documents refer to the placing

¹⁸ The role of charters as statements of royal ideology has been much discussed: see, for instance, Hagen Keller, 'The Privilege in the Public Interaction of the Exercise of Power', in *Medieval Legal Process*, ed. Mostert and Barnwell, pp. 75–108, at pp. 77–8.

¹⁹ Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word', p. 44. For some interesting analogues and a clear discussion of continental rituals associated with the making of donations, see Marguerite Ragnow, 'Ritual before the Altar: Legal Satisfaction and Spiritual Reconciliation in Eleventh-Century Anjou', in *Medieval and Early Modern Rituals: Formalized Behaviour in Europe, China and Japan*, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 13, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster (Leiden, 2002), pp. 57–80. One needs, these days, to proceed with caution when discussing medieval ritual: see the contributions of Gerd Althoff, Gert Melville, Claude Gauvard and especially Philippe Buc to *Les tendances actuelles de*

of turf on the altar, a practice which may have endured into the tenth century.²⁰ There is some reason to believe that the text of the charter, or at least the bounds, were often read out at the time of the donation in the presence of the king and his court²¹ before being written up in full shortly afterwards.²² Keynes's argument that the usual process would have been for a royal charter to have been written 'immediately in advance of the ceremony of conveyance' seems reasonable.²³ It is very probable, moreover, that the act of donation itself was an important and meaningful, even ritualistic event at which the performance of some of the text of the charter played an important role.²⁴ It would make sense, then, that tenth-century charters were drawn up prior to their reading, if for no other reason than to prevent the reader from forgetting his lines (which, in the case of an 'Æthelstan A' charter,

l'histoire du Moyen Âge en France et en Allemagne: Actes des colloques de Sèvres (1997) et Göttingen (1998), organisés par le Centre national de la recherche scientifique et le Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, Publications de la Sorbonne. Histoire ancienne et médiévale 66, ed. Otto Gerhard Oexle and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris, 2002), pp. 231–82; and also Philippe Buc, The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

²⁰ See Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 62–8.

²¹ On the complex relationship between charters and assemblies see Charles Insley's articles: 'Where Did All the Charters Go? Anglo-Saxon Charters and the New Politics of the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 24 (2002): 109–28; and 'Assemblies and Charters in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 7*, ed. P. S. Barnwell and Marco Mostert (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 47–60. Compare with Hagen Keller, 'Hulderweis durch Privilegien: symbolische Kommunikation innerhalb und jenseits des Textes', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 38 (2004): 309–21; and Levi Roach, 'Public Rites and Public Wrongs: Ritual Aspects of Diplomas in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *EME* 19 (2011): 182–203. Simon Keynes has discussed this issue in depth in 'Church Councils'.

²² This happened elsewhere on the continent; see, for instance, Wendy Davies, *Acts of Giving: Individual, Community, and Church in Tenth-Century Christian Spain* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 100–1. On the relationship between the public ceremony and the writing of charters, see Bernhard Zeller, 'Writing Charters as a Public Activity: the Example of the Carolingian Charters of St Gall', in *Medieval Legal Process*, ed. Mostert and Barnwell, pp. 27–38. The question of whether Anglo-Saxon charters were routinely written in one, two or more stages has been the cause of significant controversy. See Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 61–92. The arguments are neatly summarised by Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 92 (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 77–89. Roach's conclusion, that charters were generally produced during the assemblies at which the transactions they recorded were made (p. 89), seems entirely reasonable. See also John Maddicott's comments in *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924–1327* (Oxford, 2010), ch. 1.

²³ Keynes, 'Church Councils', p. 91.

²⁴ See *EHD*, p. 376; and Insley, 'Assemblies and Charters'. The additional meanings associated with the act of donation itself have been discussed by Hagen Keller, 'Die Herrscherurkunden: Botschaften des Privilegierungsaktes – Botschaften des Privilegien-textes', *Communicare e significare nell'alto medioevo* (2005): 231–83. See also Keller, 'The Privilege'. Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld also made some useful comments in *Do ut Des: Giving, Memoria, and Conflict Management in the Medieval Low Countries*, *Middeleeuwse studies en bronnen* 104 (Hilversum, 2007), pp. 63–82.

must have been a very real possibility). This would also have afforded abundant opportunities to whoever was producing the king's charters (and, in Æthelstan's case, perhaps even to the king himself) to make sure that they said the right things.

In the first instance, then, Æthelstan's charters might have had an audience of a few dozen, or perhaps a few hundred people, to whom they were read aloud in the presence of the king.²⁵ The high literary style of their proems and sanctions, therefore, may have been designed in part for oral impact, which would certainly help to explain their frequent use of alliteration. Of course, it is unlikely that the whole audience would have understood every word; even in the febrile intellectual atmosphere of Æthelstan's court, where it is reasonable to presume a level of 'pragmatic' literacy on the part of the majority of those in attendance,²⁶ it is hard to believe that any but the most erudite scholars could have acquired more than a loose appreciation of what Æthelstan's charters meant as they were being read out, and even they would likely have struggled at times. Perhaps this was the point, though. A striking feature of Æthelstan's charters is that, for all their bombastic language, they conform very closely to the basic structure and procedures of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. Any secular nobleman or junior ecclesiastic who had even the most basic familiarity with charters would likely have recognised an invocation, a proem, a sanction and (most importantly) a royal style when he heard one. Æthelstan's draftsmen used enough conventional, easily recognisable, formulaic language (*regnante perpetualiter, rex, sciat se nouissima ac magna examinationis die*, and so on) to signpost each section, and to ensure that the charter was decipherable by its audience. It was only once a clear expectation of what was coming had been created, that that expectation was spectacularly subverted by the deployment of outlandish vocabulary and protracted sentences. In all likelihood, the majority of those who heard the performance of a charter recognised enough of its language to know what was going on, and so could be suitably impressed when its text diverged so starkly from the norm.

The charter would then be dispatched to a religious house, usually in the vicinity of the estate that had been granted, where it would eventually be archived alongside the house's relics. In some cases, copies of the charter may also have been kept by the recipient of the

²⁵ On the nature, frequency and context of royal assemblies in Anglo-Saxon England, see Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, especially ch. 4. For a colourful and informative Carolingian analogue, see Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, 'Ritual in the Royal Chancery: Text, Image, and the Representation of Kingship in Medieval French Diplomas (700–1200)', in *European Monarchy: Its Evolution and Practice from Roman Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt, Richard A. Jackson and David J. Sturdy (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 27–40.

²⁶ Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 38–9.

grant.²⁷ While it is scarcely credible that charters were the only form of communication between the court and the provinces, it is likely that they were fundamental in maintaining contact between the king and his elite, and, moreover, in ensuring that his will was carried out in his absence.²⁸ Whilst there is good evidence to suggest a regular exchange of information between the king and the provinces in tenth-century England,²⁹ it seems to have been the case that, in the 920s and 930s, this process was carried out chiefly by agents of the king, dispatched around the country to dispense his orders personally, which likely reduced the volume of government bureaucracy.³⁰ Perhaps it was partly because of this that charters, the only royal communications to survive in any abundance from Æthelstan's reign, acquired a new importance. Written in the voice of Æthelstan himself, they were statements of his will which were designed to be seen and heard by England's educated elite, many of whom might not always attend the king's court or meet him regularly face to face. In forming their ideas about their king, then, these people would have relied on royal communications: poems, portraits,³¹ letters and, perhaps most of all, because of their quantity and wide distribution, charters. For these reasons, it is very likely that the charter's audience, once it had

²⁷ There is some evidence from the continent, and a little from England, for the existence of secular archives: see Warren Brown, 'When Documents Are Destroyed or Lost: Lay People and Archives in the Early Middle Ages', *EME* 11 (2002): 337–66; and Charles Insley, 'Archives and Lay Documentary Practice in the Anglo-Saxon World', in *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Warren Brown, Marios Constambeys, Matthew Innes and Adam Kostó (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 336–62. See also Kathryn Lowe, 'Lay Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England: The Development of the Chirograph', in *Anglo Saxon Manuscripts and Their Heritage*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 161–204.

²⁸ On the role of charters in projecting the king's power, see Keller, 'The Privilege'; and also his 'Schriftgebrauch und Symbolhandeln in der öffentlichen Kommunikation: Aspekte des gesellschaftlich-kulturellen Wandels vom 5. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert', *Fruhmittelalterliche Studien* 37 (2003): 1–24.

²⁹ The famous 'Fonthill Letter' is a good example of just such a communication between a leading nobleman and Æthelstan's father, Edward 'the Elder': see Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter'. There is some debate as to the extent to which written communication was characteristic of Anglo-Saxon government: Michael Clanchy and Henry Loyn both believed that it relied chiefly on oral pronouncements; Simon Keynes argued convincingly against this view. See Henry Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500–1087*, *The Governance of England* (London, 1984), pp. 106–18; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; and Keynes, 'Royal Government'.

³⁰ Keynes, 'Royal Government', p. 245.

³¹ Æthelstan is the first Anglo-Saxon king to have been the subject of a contemporary illustration. A fine, though clearly stylised, image of him presenting a gospel book to the community of St Cuthbert survives in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183. See David Rollason, 'St. Cuthbert and Wessex: The Evidence of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183', in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 413–24. See also Catherine Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England*, *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 3 (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 53–83.

been dispatched from the court, would have been significant: David Dumville has argued that charters were used in the tenth century to disseminate new, centrally created script forms around the country;³² if their script was being emulated by provincial scriptoria, then it is entirely possible that their grand Latin style, too, may have been consulted as a study in Latin prose composition. Perhaps they were even read out during services or at ecclesiastical gatherings. Their Latin certainly lent itself to oral delivery and the subjects of their proems and sanctions (mutability and the punishment of sinners respectively) would seem to have been entirely appropriate for such a context. At any rate, the frequency with which their formulae were recycled later in the tenth century (see pp. 175–87 below) suggests that they were kept somewhere accessible. They may even have been kept on display: so magnificent were Æthelstan's charters in their language, size and appearance that it seems very unlikely that they would have been shut away and forgotten straight away by the foundations lucky enough to receive them, which presumably was the point.

It is also worth considering whether Æthelstan's draftsmen also had another rather more esoteric audience in mind when they wrote. Charters had always commanded particular respect on account of their longevity. They were often intended to guarantee a possession for as long as there was anybody left to possess it; Æthelstan's draftsmen therefore clearly addressed themselves to posterity. How many subsequent ecclesiastics, royal officials (perhaps even kings themselves), archivists or, in time, diplomatic critics, would read over their work they could not have known, but frequent references to eternity in the texts they wrote would suggest that they were well aware that their charters would outlive them significantly, their prose remaining as their king's enduring legacy.³³

Thus, charters gave Æthelstan a direct line to the secular and religious elite of his kingdom; they were a reliable method of communication between the king and his people which enabled him to project his own image of himself directly into cloisters, halls, reliquaries and, most importantly, minds throughout England.³⁴ In recognition of this

³² David Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Background and the Earliest Phases', *ASE* 16 (1987): 147–79; and 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Mid-Century Phases', *ASE* 23 (1994): 133–64.

³³ Arguably, the most likely use of a charter was as evidence in a legal dispute, as part of which it may very well have been read aloud. See Patrick Wormald, 'Charters, Law and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Davies and Fouracre, pp. 149–68. A good discussion of this process, albeit in a Carolingian context, can be found in Karl Heidecker, 'Charters as Texts and as Objects in Judicial Actions: The Example of the Carolingian Private Charters of St Gall', in *Medieval Legal Process*, ed. Mostert and Barnwell, pp. 39–54.

³⁴ The role of charters as vehicles for transmitting royal authority was discussed by Ildar Garipzanov in *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World* (c.751–877),

role, and to ensure that they and he were taken seriously, Æthelstan's charters were specifically designed to be as imposing as possible. Accordingly, the first aspect to strike anybody who works with them is their sheer length. Put simply, they are enormous. S 441 has thirty-eight witnesses; S 407, a product of 'Æthelstan A', has fifty-nine. S 416, which survives as an original single sheet, runs to twenty (long) lines of text prior to the witness list. Most Anglo-Saxon charters of the eighth and ninth centuries had about two dozen witnesses at most and ran to about eighteen (much shorter) lines of text. They were usually not much larger than an A4 sheet of paper. Æthelstan's charters tend to be A3 at least. In terms of their size, then, these documents were clearly something new. Their script, too, is interesting. Written in practised, neat square minuscule, they visibly matched their imposing Latin style with a 'new' script. However, the square minuscule of Æthelstan's charters was in no sense a radically modern script (as was the case with Anglo-Caroline when it was introduced a little later in the century); rather, it was born from a reinvention of the insular hybrid minuscule that had been in regular use in England since the seventh century.³⁵ It did not represent a drive for innovation as much as for standardisation and, much more importantly, it visibly invoked the scribal culture of the Anglo-Saxon past.

As far as the king was concerned, the most important part of the charter was likely to have been the royal style. This was where his authority was explained and where his scribes had the best opportunity to lionise him. It is not surprising, then, that Æthelstan's charters have always been best known for their royal styles.³⁶ The table below charts their evolution. Only those charters which are certainly datable to a specific year have been included.

Arguably, the language that Æthelstan used to express the extent of his power is interesting not because of what it means, but precisely because of what it does not mean. The word *rex*, which had always been the standard word for 'king' in England, remained in

Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages 16 (Leiden, 2008), especially ch. 1. Garipzanov argued that the power of charters to affirm the authority of the monarch was limited because 'they were hardly capable of reaching a broad audience' (p. 31). While this is no doubt true of Anglo-Saxon as well as of Carolingian charters, it may be worth considering that what the audience of a charter, which was made up of the kingdom's religious and secular elite, lacked in quantity it more than made up for in quality.

³⁵ Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Mid-Century Phases', p. 135.

³⁶ On Æthelstan's royal styles see, for instance: Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 23–6; Harald Kleinschmidt, 'Die Titulaturen englischer Könige im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert', in *Intitulatio III: Lateinische Herrschertitel und Herrschertitulaturen vom 7. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herwig Wolfram and Anton Scharer (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1988), pp. 9–74; Foot, *Æthelstan, passim*, but especially pp. 213–15; and George Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?' *TRHS* 5th series 21 (2011): 59–91.

Table 4

Date	Charter	Style in text	Style in witness list
925	S 395	ego Æthelstan diuina indulgente clemencia rex Anglorum tociusque climatis ferme cataclismatum gurgitibus Cristiane patrigene preuisor	Æthelstan rex
926	S 396	ego Æthelstanus Angulsaxonum rex non modica infulatus, sublimatus, dignitate superno instigatus desiderio	Æpelstanus rex
	S 397	ego Æthelstanus Angulsaxonum rex non modica, infulatus sublimatus, dignitate superno instigatus desiderio	Æthelstanus rex
928	S 399*	ego Ædelstanus donifluo Dei gubernamine rex Anglorum	Aðelstanus rex Anglorum
	S 400*	ego Ædelstanus donifluo Dei gubernamine rex Anglorum	Aðelstanus rex Anglorum
930	S 403*	ego Athelstanus rex Anglorum ... per eiusdem omnipatrantis dextram totius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Athelstanus singularis priuilegium monarchia preditus rex
	S 405*	ego Æthelstanus rex anglorum ... per eiusdem omni patrantis dexteram totius bryttannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æthelstanus singularis priuilegii monarchia predictus rex
931	S 412*	ego Æðelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Bryttaniæ regni solio sublimatus	Ego Aðelstanus singularis privilegii monarchia predictus rex
	S 413*	ego Æthelstanus rex Anglorum, per omnipatrantis dexteram tocius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æthelstanus singularis priuilegii g[i]erarchia preditus rex
	S 1604* (abbr.)	rex	Æthelstanus singularis priuilegii monarchia predictus rex
	S 416*	Æðelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Bryttaniæ regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æðelstanus florentis Brytaniæ monarchia praeditus rex
932	S 417*	ego Æpelstanus per omnitenentis dexteram tocius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æðelstanus singularis privilegii ierarchia præditus rex
	S 418*	ego Athelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æthelstanus singularis priuilegii monarchia predictus rex

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	S 418a*	ego Æþelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipotentis dexteram totius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æþelstanus singularis priuilegii ierarchia predictus rex
	S 419*	ego Aþelstanus rex Anglorum, per omnipotentis dexteram tocius Britannie regni solio sublimatus	Ego Athelstanus singularis priuilegii monarchia predictus rex
933	S 379*	ego Edwardus [sic] rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Britannie regni solio sublimatus quandam telluris particulam	Ego Edwardus [sic] singularis priuilegii ierarchia predictus rex
	S 422*	ego Æthelstanus rex Anglorum per omnitonantis dexteram totius Bryttannie regni solio sullimatus	Ego Æþelstanus totius floreantis Bryttannie rex
	S 423*	ego Æthelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram apice totius Albionis sullimatus	Ego Æþelstanus singularis priuilegii ierarchia predictus rex
934	S 425*	ego Æðelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Britanniae regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æðelstanus singularis privilegii ierarchia predictus rex
	S 426*	Ego Ethelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipotentis dexteram totius Britanniae regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æðelstanus singularis privilegii ierarchia praeditus rex
	S 407*	ego Æðelstanus rex Anglorum per omnipotentis dextram, quae Christus est, totius Brittanniae regni solio sublimatus	Ego Æðelstanus singularis privilegii ierarchia praeditus rex
935	S 429	ego Aþelstanus nodante Dei gracia basileos Anglorum et eque tocius Britannie orbis Deicolarumque fylos atque curanculus eorum non innocenter diuinam amonicionem obaudiens	Ego Athelstanus gracia Dei rex Anglorum
	S 430	ego Æðelstanus nodante Dei gratia basileus Anglorum et equae totius Bryttanniae orbis curagulus antilogium predecessorum meorum et regaliū infularum non obliviscens	Ego Æðelstanus Dei gratia tocius gentis Anglorum
936	S 431	ego Athelstanus nodante Dei gratia basileos Anglorum et eque totius Britanniae orbis gubernatur litterarum memorie commendare procuravi	Ego Athelstanus rex totius Britannie

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937	S 432	Ego Athelstan, Rex totius Albionis	Ego Athelstan Rex totius Britanniae
	S 437 (abbr.)	Ego Aethelstanus, etc., rex Anglorum et eque totius Albionis gubernator	
	S 438	ego Æðelstanus nodante Dei gratia basileos Anglorum et et eque totius Britannie orbis curagulus	Ego Æpelstanus rex totius Bryttannie
938	S 441	ego Æpelstanus desiderio regni celestis exardens favente superno numine basileus industrius Anglorum cunctarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium	Ego Æpelstanus rex tocius Brittanniæ
	S 442	ego Athelstanus desiderio regni celestis exardens favente superno numine basileos industrius Anglorum cunctarumque gencium in circuitu persistencium	Ego Apelstanus rex totius Britannie
	S 444	Ego Æpelstan tocius rex Britanniae	Æpelstan rex
	S 445	ego Apelstanus rex, diuina fauente gracia tocius Britannie primatum regalis regiminis obtinens	Ego Athelstanus rex tocius Britannie
939	S 446	ego Æpelstanus . nodante Dei gratia basileos Anglorum et equæ totius Brittanniæ orbis curagulus	Ego Æpelstanus Rex totius Brittanniæ
	S 447†	ego Æpelstanus divina mihi adridente gratia rex Anglorum et curagulus totius Bryttanniæ	Ego Æpelstanus rex totius Bryttanniæ
	S 448	ego Æpelstanus nodante Dei gratia basileos Anglorum et eque tocius Brittannie orbis gubernator	Ego Æpelstanus rex totius Byrttannie
	S 449†	ego Æpelstanus divina mihi adridente gratia rex Anglorum et æque totius Bryttanniæ curagulus	[+ Ego Æpel]stanus rex totius Bryttanniæ

* Work of 'Æthelstan A'

† Work of 'Æthelstan C'

use throughout Æthelstan's reign. But, at the same time, three more unusual ruler-words were introduced: Æthelstan became a *curagulus* ('guardian'), a *basileus* ('emperor') and a *gubernator* ('helmsman'). The meanings of these words could hardly be more different. *Curagulus*,

which is a diminutive form, is a rare but rather mundane word, literally meaning 'caretaker' (formed from *cura* and *ago*; although Æthelstan's scribes probably intended it to mean something more like 'overseer'). *Basileus* has obvious Greek overtones; in ancient Greek it was a word for a chief or prince, but it acquired imperial connotations when it was used by the Byzantine emperors and then (controversially) adopted by Charlemagne following his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in 800. It remained in use on the continent in the tenth century. *Gubernator* was a word sometimes used as an epithet for God but, in the secular sense, it was, once again, quite mundane, meaning simply 'governor'. In terms of their strict meanings, none of these words was especially appropriate for Æthelstan: he was much more than a *curagulus*, rather less than a *basileus* and not really a *gubernator* in any effective sense.³⁷ Clearly, these words were not chosen for the accuracy of their meaning so much as for the intellectual clout they carried with them. *Curagulus* was extremely rare, so much so that it was often miscopied by subsequent scribes who failed to understand it (as it was in S 429, where it became *curanculus*). Likewise, *basileus* was a Graecism, albeit not an especially recherché one; the point was emphasised in several of Æthelstan's charters by the addition of an appropriate Greek ending, *-os*. And *gubernator*, though not rare in itself, had both Christian and classical overtones. Each word was meant to illustrate the exalted nature of Æthelstan's office by dazzling the would-be translator with obscure, highbrow vocabulary that would send him hurrying to his glossary. The precise meanings, it seems, were secondary to the connotations these words carried with them.

A word which certainly was used for its precise meaning, however, was *Britannia*. Anglo-Saxon kings had long since learned the advantages of making grandiose claims about themselves in their charters: the most notorious instance of this, perhaps, was the decision to call Æthelbald of Mercia *rex Britanniae* in the famous 'Ismere Diploma', S 89, which was drafted in 736.³⁸ Simon Keynes, unimpressed by Æthelbald's showboating, sternly condemned this style as being 'in the realms of sycophantic hyperbole and political fantasy'.³⁹ Yet, in comparison to the bombastic styles that were routinely

³⁷ The use of apparently inappropriate personal styles in charters and other documents was certainly not an exclusively Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. It has been discussed in a Carolingian context by Garipzanov in *Symbolic Language*, ch. 3.

³⁸ The scholarship surrounding this document and its peculiar style is appropriately vast. A good introduction to its context is Barbara Yorke, 'The Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship', in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 2, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 92, ed. David Brown, James Campbell and Sonia Chadwick Hawkes (Oxford 1981), pp. 171–200.

³⁹ Simon Keynes, 'The Kingdom of the Mercians in the Eighth Century', in *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia. Papers from a Conference Held in Manchester in*

used in Æthelstan's charters, Æthelbald's *rex Britanniae* comes to seem rather modest. But if *rex Britanniae*, 'King of Britain', was 'sycophantic hyperbole', then what should we make of the likes of *ego Athelstanus, desiderio regni celestis exardens favente superno numine, basileos industrius Anglorum cunctarumque gentium in circuitu persistencium*, 'I Æthelstan, burning for the longed-for, celestial nod of approval from the heavenly kingdom, assiduous emperor of the English and of all the peoples present in the vicinity'? It is a wonder, with kings like this around, that later Anglo-Saxon England did not produce more satirists.

Æthelstan began his career as plain old *rex Anglorum* but, in 930, became *totius Brittanniae regni solio sublimatus* ('raised up to the throne of the kingdom of the whole of Britain') as well. By the end of his reign, formulae which incorporated a sense of ruling *Britannia* became commonplace. Æthelstan had received the submission of Constantine and Owain, kings of Scotland and Strathclyde respectively, in 927; the following year, he exacted tribute from the major Welsh princes, three of whom attested S 400 in 928 as *subreguli*.⁴⁰ Æthelstan's claim to be *rex Britanniae*, then, was clearly not without some substance.

Britannia, however, was much more than just a word. Since the eighth century, it had carried with it a good deal of ideological baggage. Æthelstan's draftsmen would certainly have understood this and, more importantly, so would the majority of their charters' intended audience. Specifically, most educated people in the 920s and 930s would have been aware of the significance that *Britannia* had held for Bede.⁴¹ Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* had been prescribed reading ever since Alfred deemed it one of the 'books most needful for all men to know' at the end of the ninth century and produced a vernacular translation.⁴² Accordingly, Bede's idea of *Britannia* as a religious-political entity, domination of which was the natural goal of England's ecclesiastical and secular leaders, would have been widely known. The regular use of the word *Britannia* (which is the first word of Book I of Bede's *Historia*) and also of Albion (which is the sixth word) in Æthelstan's charters very likely represents an attempt to plug them into this powerful and compelling intellectual heritage and to associate Æthelstan with the island-wide hegemony that Bede had implied.⁴³

2000, Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 383, ed. David Hill and M. Worthington (Oxford 2005), pp. 1–26, at p. 7.

⁴⁰ See Foot, *Æthelstan*, pp. 18–20.

⁴¹ On Bede and *Britanna* see Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of *Gens Anglorum*', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies presented to John Michael Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129; and Molyneux, 'The Old English Bede'.

⁴² See ch. 1, n. 000.

⁴³ For more on the use of *Britannia* in tenth-century charters, see Molyneux, 'Some Tenth-Century English Kings'.

However, the desire of Æthelstan's draftsmen to harness the power of the past extended beyond the use of the word *Britannia*. They might have been thinking Bede's thoughts, but they were unmistakably speaking with Aldhelm's voice. The Latin he wrote was some of the most technically adept and rhetorically ferocious ever to emerge not just from England but from the whole of early medieval Europe. Characterised by long, complex sentences littered with endless, interdependent subclauses and, more daunting for the would-be translator, bizarre and obscure vocabulary, his writing was a masterclass in Latin prose composition. And there is no doubt whatever that his work was being read, quoted, paraphrased and even imitated by Æthelstan's draftsmen, particularly by 'Æthelstan A'. The full debt that 'Æthelstan A' owed to Aldhelm will be explored in depth in the following chapter; for now, it is enough to say not only that almost every one of his charters quoted Aldhelm at least once (he was particularly enthusiastic about the prose *De uirginitate*), but also that his whole Latin prose style was so effective an imitation of Aldhelm's that, at times, it seemed almost like a parody.⁴⁴ The debt owed to Aldhelm by Æthelstan's other draftsmen is less obvious but is detectable nonetheless.

Aldhelm's Latin style was characterised chiefly by four features: the use of obscure vocabulary and Graecisms; hyperbaton (where noun–adjective pairs are split apart and interlaced around each other); hyperbole (where two or more words or complementary phrases with effectively the same meaning are placed next to each other); and complex alliterating patterns.⁴⁵ Each of these techniques is clearly visible across Æthelstan's charters.

Throughout the corpus, obscure words, Graecisms and archaisms were used in places where other more conventional vocabulary might have done just as well. S 395, the earliest of Æthelstan's extant charters, set the tone. The second word in this document is *Theo*, the Greek word for 'God' (instead of Latin, *Deo*). *Theo* was not unique in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic: it had been used before in two Mercian charters issued in the name of King Beorhtwulf, S 198 and S 205, both of which were preserved at Worcester. Its meaning cannot have been hard to work out, even for somebody with no knowledge of Greek. The purpose of using it, then, is simply to show off, to use a slightly obscure Greek

⁴⁴ The point was illustrated effectively by Donald Bullough in 'The Educational Tradition in England from Alfred to Ælfric: Teaching *utrius linguae*', in his *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 297–334, at pp. 304–5; and by Michael Lapidge in 'The Hermeneutic Style', p. 138.

⁴⁵ For a far more precise explanation of Aldhelm's style, see Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*; Winterbottom, 'Aldhelm's Prose Style'; and Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, eds, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979). The stylistic techniques of Aldhelm and 'Æthelstan A' are compared directly in the following chapter, pp. 100–4.

word instead of the common Latin one. A similar enthusiasm for Greek-derived vocabulary can be seen elsewhere: *cardinis* (S 396 and S 397) was derived, ultimately, from κάρδιη, and was used (in its Latin form) by a series of Latin authors, notably Lucan and Virgil; *pellax* (S 395) also had Greek origins and had been used by Virgil; *caraxatis* (S 395), too, was drawn from Greek, although this word had an earlier history in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. In all these cases, just as with *Theo*, there were other words which would have performed the same task just as well, but the draftsmen preferred to select an obscure, difficult word which proved their literary sophistication. This approach was taken to extremes in the work 'Æthelstan A'. As the analysis of his vocabulary in the following chapter (pp. 98–100 and 112–24) demonstrates, in every charter he wrote, he went to remarkable lengths in selecting his vocabulary, turning not just to Greek but also to Hebrew and even inventing the occasional portmanteau in his search for the most obscure ways of expressing himself.

Aldhelm's other signature techniques are also visible, usually in combination, in virtually every charter in the corpus. Good examples of hyperbaton can be found in S 396 (*Cuncta que humanis optutibus caducarum molimina*) and S 411 (*secretis humane naturæ mysteriis*); basic hyperbole can be seen in S 432 (*de summo caeli apice*); and more or less complex alliterating patterns are present in S 397 (*cum ceteris comitibus*) and S 430 (*cosmi seriem quisque sollerti*). There is no doubt that Æthelstan's draftsmen, particularly 'Æthelstan A', aspired to write 'poetic' prose and, moreover, that Aldhelm was their model in doing so.⁴⁶

On one level, Aldhelm clearly provided Æthelstan's draftsmen with a stylistic archetype. The Latin he wrote appealed to them because of its complexity, its sophistication and, perhaps above all, its obscurity. Beyond this, however, by taking Aldhelm as their model, Æthelstan's draftsmen were following a well-established Anglo-Saxon tradition. Several scholars, notably Andy Orchard, have drawn attention to the existence of an Aldhelmian 'school' in Anglo-Latin.⁴⁷ The influence that Aldhelm had on the Anglo-Latin writers who succeeded him, ranging from Boniface and his correspondents who were writing in the middle of the eighth century, to Æthilwulf, who wrote his *De abbatibus* at the beginning of the ninth, was profound to the extent that the imitation of his style had become, by the ninth century, a distinguishing feature of Anglo-Latin literature. It was a typically Anglo-Saxon way of writing, similar to but clearly distinct from the comparable Latin styles which

⁴⁶ For a good discussion of what was considered 'poetic' in Anglo-Latin, see Lapidge, 'Poeticism in Pre-Conquest Anglo-Latin Prose'. The language of Æthelstan's charters, particularly that of the 'Æthelstan A' documents, fulfills most of Lapidge's criteria.

⁴⁷ Andy Orchard, 'Old English and Latin Poetic Traditions', in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, Blackwell Companion to Literature and Culture 67, ed. Corinne Saunders (Oxford, 2010), pp. 65–82, at pp. 73–5.

developed in Ireland and on the continent. Aldhelm was not imitated by these authors by chance: rather, his work formed an integral part of Anglo-Saxon curricula from the early eighth century onwards.⁴⁸ By emulating his work, Æthelstan's draftsmen were not doing anything new. Quite the opposite, in fact: they were reviving a traditional, Anglo-Saxon form which had a long and established history reaching back to the 'Golden Age' of the late seventh century.

All this sent a clear and deliberate ideological message to the audience for Æthelstan's charters: the court was awash with foreign scholars, hostages and visitors, many of whom brought with them continental books and manuscripts to bolster England's somewhat depleted collections;⁴⁹ yet, Æthelstan was an Anglo-Saxon and, more than that, an Anglo-Saxon king. For his ideology, therefore, he turned to Bede; for his style, he turned to Aldhelm; the overall effect was an implicit but compelling invocation of the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age', the *gesæliglice tida* ('fortunate times'), as Æthelstan's grandfather had put it in his prose preface to the *Cura pastoralis*, when learning flourished throughout the kingdom.⁵⁰ None who read or heard one of Æthelstan's charters could be left in any doubt that, despite the upheavals of the ninth century, Æthelstan's England was in touch with a native literary heritage that was more than a match for anything the continent had to offer. It has long been acknowledged that the Anglo-Saxon past was influential in the mid-tenth century.⁵¹ The evidence of Æthelstan's charters would seem to suggest that the authority of the past was harnessed somewhat earlier.

The Latin style of Æthelstan's charters, therefore, was certainly neither new nor original. It was not even a new departure in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. While it had never been used consistently before, several charters from ninth-century Mercia exhibited very similar traits and were clearly inspired by the work of Aldhelm.⁵² At the same time, it is worth noting that neither the substance nor the

⁴⁸ See Michael Lapidge, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* pp. 455–98; and Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, ch. 5.

⁴⁹ See Simon Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 143–201; and Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 167–73.

⁵⁰ For an edition of the prose preface of the *Cura pastoralis*, see Whitelock, ed., *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, pp. 4–7.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Antonia Gransden, 'Traditionalism and Continuity during the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism', *JEH* 40 (1989): 159–207, reprinted in her *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval History* (London, 1992), pp. 31–80. Compare with Simon Coates, 'Perceptions of the Anglo-Saxon Past in the Tenth-Century Monastic Reform Movement', in *The Church Retrospective: Papers Read at the 1995 Summer Meeting and the 1996 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, *Studies in Church History* 33, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 61–74.

⁵² See above, pp. 32–46.

fundamental purpose of Æthelstan's charters differed substantially from those that had preceded them. Their proems, almost without exception, dwell on the mutability of secular things and the transience of the mortal world. That of S 430 is a good example:

Neminem quippe in mortali solo quamvis universam cosmi seriem quisque solerti mentis acumine perlustret expertem reperiret debite mortis extitisse illamque juste severitatis sententiam protoplasti prevaricationis noxam delatam evasisse.

Although each man might examine the whole course of the cosmos with skilled activity of mind, he will find that nobody indeed on mortal soil has been exempt from due death nor has escaped that sentence of just severity meted out for the first-created's crime of transgression.

Likewise, the sanctions all threaten any hypothetical miscreant who would seek to contravene the terms of the document with damnation on Judgement Day. That of S 441 is a typical example:

Denique vero si quis nobis non optantibus nostrum hoc donum violari fraudulenter perpetrando consenserit, consideret hinc: se die ultima iudicii coram Deo rationem redditurum atque cum reprobis quibus (dicitur 'Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternum') penis atrocibus se esse passurum si non antea corporea lamentatione emendaverit.

Therefore, if anybody, which we do not wish, should decide, with deceitful execution, that this, our gift, should be dishonoured, let him consider this: that on the final day of judgement, in the presence of God, a reckoning shall be returned to him (as it is said: 'depart from me, you accursed, into the everlasting fire' [Matt. 25:41]) and, along with the other liars, he will have to endure awful punishments if, before this physical lamentation, he has not made amends.

The language and style, of course, are impressive in both of these excerpts, but the substance of the text was just the same as it had always been. Since the seventh century, morose Anglo-Saxon draftsmen had dwelled on transience and mortality in their proems and had promised all manner of hellish punishments to anyone who threatened their charters' integrity. There is no doubt that Æthelstan's draftsmen were a good deal more imaginative than their predecessors in terms of how they verbalised their ideas; yet, throughout the 920s and 930s, these ideas were the same ones that Anglo-Saxon draftsmen had always expressed.

Similarly, the legal function of Æthelstan's charters did not change at all, despite their baffling Latin. In some respects, these documents actually became simpler to understand than their predecessors. When it came to writing the 'important' bits of the charter – that is the dispositive section, the boundary clause and the witness list, which all

performed legal functions and would be referred to in the event that the grant was disputed – Æthelstan’s draftsmen changed down into an unembellished, straightforward stylistic register. The tortuous Latin of the proem and sanction gave way to a linear, much less ostentatious and very much more lucid style. The bounds, moreover, came to be written in Old English for the first time as a matter of course.⁵³ All of this made Æthelstan’s charters effective, legally valid records of land grants which were, presumably, as useful as any other Anglo-Saxon charters in resolving disputes over land; that they were preserved in such abundance suggests that they continued to be thought of as such long after his reign had ended. The dispositive section of S 438 demonstrates the lucidity of the charters’ legal sections very well:

Brydancumb juxta dirivativis aquarum cursibus Æt noddre ut illa prefata congregatio predictam terram habeat ac possideat cum omnibus ad se rite pertinentibus campis pratis pascuis dirivatisque cursibus aquarum ceu supra diximus in eternam hereditatem.

[I give that land which is called] Burcombe, adjacent to running courses of water at *Noddre*, so that the aforementioned congregation should have that previously mentioned land and possess it with all that rightly pertains to the meadows, pasture, fishing-places and watercourses, as we have said above, in eternal hereditary right.

This rest of this document is a standard Æthelstan charter, written in characteristically sophisticated Latin. However, the essential legal purpose that it had to perform has not been forgotten. This section, which recorded the precise nature and intention of the grant is written in extremely straightforward language. The syntax is generally linear, with verbs placed at the end as was usual (for instance: *habeat*), subjects at the beginning (*illa ... congregatio*), dependent adjectives, nouns and participles next to each other (*prefata congregatio praedictam terram*) and no unusual or bizarre vocabulary getting in the way of the sense.

The vernacular boundary clauses of these documents were even simpler to understand. This example, drawn from S 396, describes an estate which would now be adjacent to the A5, just outside Leighton Buzzard:

Ðær se dic sceot in Wæclinga stræte, anlanges Wæxlinga stræte ðæt on ðane ford, þæt anlang broces in þanne oðerne ford, þonne of ðæm forde up on þane welle, 7 þanan in ðæt dell, þanan of ðæm delle in ðone dic, of ðæm dice in ðone oþerne dic, þone of ðæm dice in þone borc, þonne

⁵³ Vernacular boundary clauses had been used since the ninth century. Æthelstan’s charters, however, were the first to use them regularly. See Kathryn Lowe, ‘The Development of the Anglo-Saxon Boundary Clause’, *Nomina: Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland* 21 (1998): 63–100.

Æthelstan

of þam broce to Cynburge wellan, þanne anlang dices to east coten,
þæt þanan in þane ealdan broc, up of þæm ealdan broce on æfem ðæt
riþig, þæt up rihte in ðiod weg, æftær ðiod wege in þone dic, æfter dice
in Wæxlinga strate.

It runs from the dyke to Watling Street, along Watling Street as far as the ford, then along the brook as far as the other ford, then from that ford up as far as the well, and then to the dell, then from the dell to the dyke, then from that dyke as far as the other dyke, then from that dyke as far as the brook, then from the brook to Cynburg's well, then along the dykes going to the east, and then along the old brook, then up from the old brook to the thorn-bush, then up along the people-road, after the people-road along the dyke, and after the dyke back to Watling Street.

A reader with the most basic level of literacy would have been able to understand these bounds. Had this land been disputed, then, for all its imagery and stylistic pretention, the charter would have remained the critical tool for resolving that dispute.

Conclusion

Æthelstan's charters, for all their bombastic language and imagery, did not suddenly appear from nowhere. Presaged in their language and purpose by the developments that had taken place during Edward's reign and, beyond that, by the habit of using Aldhelm's work in charters that had developed in ninth-century Mercia, they were carefully constructed and closely controlled documents, every aspect of which was designed to convey a particular message about the supremacy of the king and his court. The authority of the Anglo-Saxon past was fundamental in projecting this message: in their language, Æthelstan's charters clearly invoked the work of Aldhelm; in their ideology they harked back to Bede; and in their script they reconstructed the visual culture of the 'Golden Age'. To do all of this in a charter was, undoubtedly, an innovation made possible by the centralisation of charter production; but beyond that, Æthelstan's charters drew deeply on three centuries of Anglo-Saxon intellectual tradition.

However, even though the origins of the Latin style of Æthelstan's charters lay firmly in the past, the circumstances which made it possible are certainly to be found at Æthelstan's court in the 920s and 930s. Much has been written about learning and scholarship during Æthelstan's reign, and about the remarkable individuals who, at this time, were attracted not just to England, but to the court of the king in particular.⁵⁴ In the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, wandering

⁵⁴ See, for instance: Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books'; Michael Lapidge, 'Israel the Grammarian in Anglo-Saxon England', in *ALL*, pp. 94–5; and, in the same volume,

scholars were usually drawn to, or even founded, great centres of religious learning. This was the pattern followed by Columbanus at Bobbio and Luxeuil, by Aldhelm's pupils who went to continue their education in Ireland, and by Boniface at Echternach. It is striking, then, that the scholars who came to England in the 920s and 930s sought intellectual nourishment at the court of a king (just as Alcuin had at the court of Charlemagne) rather than at a religious foundation. Thus, learning and scholarly discussion, just like charter-production, was centralised to an extent by Æthelstan. The impact of this on his charters was twofold: the availability of so many books and manuscripts and the presence of so many scholars informed and facilitated the kind of prose that Æthelstan's draftsmen wanted to write; at the same time, it became a matter of high importance that the scholarly achievements of Æthelstan's court, which had become the intellectual focal point of the whole kingdom, be clearly demonstrated.

The prose that these draftsmen wrote, moreover, responded to the new context of the charter. As charters were dispatched to every corner of Æthelstan's kingdom, so each of them made a powerful statement about the king and his court. On the battlefield and by means of careful diplomacy, Æthelstan had built his political hegemony; his charters made sure that everyone knew it, of course, but beyond that, they also established the king's intellectual supremacy. Every time the would-be translator had to dig out his glossary to work out what on earth was going on in one of Æthelstan's proems or sanctions (or, in more recent times, spent a morning running words through electronic databases before, in desperation, resorting to Google), the king's court scored an intellectual victory, proving its scholarly superiority. In their script and in their Latin, Æthelstan's charters set the standard, proving that the court was at the very cutting edge of England's vibrant intellectual culture and challenging anybody who read them, so long as they could understand them, to follow up their literary allusions, to ponder their fantastic imagery and to work out the meaning of their obscure Graecisms and mischievous portmanteaus. Nobody who read one of Æthelstan's charters, either in the tenth century or since, could be in any possible doubt that something very exciting indeed was going on, and that England's political centre was also its cultural and intellectual engine room.

This prose style was not the kind of thing that could be acquired following an afternoon's light reading; rather, it was clearly the

'Schools Learning and Literature in Tenth-Century England', pp. 1–48; and 'Some Latin Poems'. See also Michael Wood, 'A Carolingian Scholar in the Court of King Æthelstan', in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)*, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 37, ed. David Rollason, Conrad Leyser and Hannah Williams (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 135–62. Sarah Foot paints a vivid portrait of Æthelstan's court in *Æthelstan*, ch. 3.

result of years of learning. The men who wrote it, who must have been educated in England over the first two decades of the tenth century,⁵⁵ were probably products of the renewed emphasis placed on learning and education by King Alfred. It is a satisfying thought that Alfred's aim to restore learning in England should have triumphed so spectacularly in the reign of his grandson.⁵⁶ Amongst these draftsmen, at the very centre of (and, perhaps, synonymous with) the royal writing office, charged with producing such emphatic, compelling and remarkable documents in fiendish Latin, there was style's chief practitioner, the maestro: 'Æthelstan A'.

⁵⁵ Some have wondered whether one or more of Æthelstan's draftsmen might have been of continental origin. See, for instance, Chaplais, 'The Royal Anglo-Saxon "Chancery"', p. 49; and Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems', p. 56 n. 74 and p. 85 n. 159. Such ideas are fraught with obstacles, not least the question of how a foreign scribe could have become so familiar with the formulae and procedures of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic in so short a time (in the case of the somewhat dubious charter discussed by Lapidge, it is very clear that the scribe knew very little about Anglo-Saxon ways of doing things).

⁵⁶ The caveat here is that doubts have been expressed as to the extent to which Alfred wished to restore knowledge of Latin, at least amongst the clergy: see Malcolm Godden, 'King Alfred's Preface and the Teaching of Latin in Anglo-Saxon England', *EHR* 117 (2002): 596–604. That said, David Dumville has convincingly traced the evolution and development of Alfred's programme of reforms through the tenth century: see Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, pp. 185–205.

‘Æthelstan A’

‘Æthelstan A’ was one of the most enigmatic Latinists ever to have worked in pre-Conquest England. Had he been a writer of hagiography, history or poetry, we might expect a deluge of scholarship scrutinising in minute detail the finer points of his influences and influence, his background, his education, his psychology, his Latin style and his career; yet, as a charter draftsman, even though he was responsible for producing the literature for which Æthelstan’s reign is perhaps best known, he has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. ‘One would like to know more of “Æthelstan A” himself’, wrote Simon Keynes at the end of the 1990s, ‘because he clearly deserves recognition as a figure of singular importance at King Æthelstan’s court.’¹

It was W. H. Stevenson who, in a private letter of 1916, first drew attention to a pattern in charters from Æthelstan’s reign: ‘in Æthelstan’s time’, he wrote, ‘we find charters in the hand of one and the same scribe in different parts of England.’² In 1935, Richard Drögereit christened the owner of this hand ‘Æthelstan A’, following the convention of the time in naming him after the king he served.³ Despite being a little prosaic (not to mention impossible to put into the genitive on account of its rather awkward inverted commas), the name stuck and the nature of this draftsman’s employment became a subject of fierce debate. Pierre Chaplais argued that at such an early period of the tenth century, the only active scriptorium in England was at Winchester. He concluded, therefore, that ‘Æthelstan A’ must have been an ecclesiastical scribe based at Winchester.⁴ He subsequently changed his mind and wondered if ‘Æthelstan A’ might have been based at Christ Church, Canterbury, instead.⁵ Simon Keynes, deeming Chaplais’s initial argument ‘not decisive’,⁶ put forward a compelling case for the existence of a royal writing office in the 920s and 930s, at

¹ Simon Keynes, ‘England c. 900–1016’ in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, III: c. 900–c. 1024, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 456–84, at p. 470.

² Cited by Richard Drögereit in ‘Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?’, at p. 340.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 345–8.

⁴ Chaplais, ‘Origin and Authenticity’, pp. 45–6.

⁵ Chaplais, ‘The Royal Anglo-Saxon “Chancery” of the Tenth Century Revisited’, pp. 41–51.

⁶ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 21 n. 21.

the centre which was 'Æthelstan A'.⁷ 'Æthelstan A' may well have been an ecclesiastic, but what mattered, Keynes argued, was that he was attached to Æthelstan's court; when a charter had to be drawn up, it was to him that the job was delegated regardless of where, when and to whom the grant was made.

Despite provoking such a keen debate, this remarkable writer, whose significance for the administrative and literary history of tenth-century England is hard to underestimate, remains a mystery, nothing more than a name which carries with it connotations of hellish imagery, paragraph-long sentences and indecipherable vocabulary. It is not even certain that 'Æthelstan A' was a single person rather than a formulary from whose pages diplomatic clichés were plucked by whoever happened to be nearest when a charter was called for. On closer inspection, however, a good deal of the inscrutability surrounding the career of this draftsman falls away. If it can be established that 'Æthelstan A' was indeed a single individual, and quite an extraordinary one at that, then, by analysis of his educational background and his Latin style, it may be possible to define him as the exceptionally fine author of Anglo-Latin that he was and, at long last, to give him a little of the recognition he so richly deserves.

The corpus

Nineteen charters are extant which are generally considered, by reason of their shared diplomatic characteristics, to be more or less authentic products of 'Æthelstan A'. These are summarised chronologically in Table 5.⁸

By itself, this corpus reveals several interesting aspects of the career of 'Æthelstan A'. First, it is absolutely clear that 'Æthelstan A' travelled with Æthelstan's court: he was responsible for charters issued all over England, which disposed of different estates in different areas, and which were issued to a range of different recipients, both institutions and individuals. On several occasions (Easter Day, 16 April 928, for example), he wrote two charters on the same day which were

⁷ Ibid., especially pp. 80–1.

⁸ For a full set of references on each charter, see Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*; and, for a more up-to-date bibliography, see www.esawyer.org.uk. David Woodman has, quite rightly, considered whether a quantity of other diplomatic material, including two charters preserved in the archive at Malmesbury, S 434 and S 435, which are clearly spurious in their present form, may preserve authentic elements of the work of 'Æthelstan A': see Woodman, "'Æthelstan A' and the Rhetoric of Rule', p. 248 n. 132; and Kelly, *Malmesbury*, p. 224. The Malmesbury charters are closely related to S 458, one of the last products of 'Æthelstan A', which is also a somewhat problematic text. See also Simon Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670–1066*, ASNC Guides, Texts, and Studies 5 (Cambridge, 2002).

subsequently preserved in different archives, suggesting that they were distributed to these local centres after they had been produced. The corpus also demonstrates that the career of 'Æthelstan A' was comparatively short: of the charters which are certainly datable, his first (S 399 and S 400) were composed in 928 and his last (S 426) in 934, which would suggest that his availability to the court was limited to these seven years,⁹ during which time he exercised a monopoly over charter production.

Table 5

S number and archive	Date and Place of Issue	Details	Notes
S 399 (Glastonbury)	16 April (Easter Day) 928, Exeter	Athelstan grants Ælfflæd twenty hides at <i>Winterburna</i> (place uncertain, but possibly Winterbourne, near Bristol)	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 400 (Old Minster, Winchester)	16 April (Easter Day) 928, Exeter	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at Odstock, Wiltshire, to Byrhtferth, his minister.	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 403 (Selsey)	3 April 930, Lyminster	Æthelstan grants four hides at Medmerry with woodland at Earnley and Meadow outside Chichester to Beornheah, bishop of Selsey.	Basically authentic, but partially rewritten to include fuller details of woodland and meadow. ^a
S 405 (Exeter, <i>ex</i> Crediton)	29 April 930, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants Eadulf, bishop of Crediton, and his <i>familia</i> three hides at Sandford.	Extant in MS from s. x/xi. Although some material is likely to have been fabricated, the charter may have an authentic basis. ^b
S 412 (Winchester, Old Minster)	23 March 931, Colchester	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Ecchinswell to Ælfric.	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 413 (Abingdon)	20 June 931, Worthy	Æthelstan grants twenty hides at Watchfield to Ælfric, his <i>minister</i>	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 1604 (Abingdon)	15 July 931	Grant of land at <i>Bultheswithe</i>	Heavily abbreviated.

⁹ If authentic material does indeed lie behind the two Malmesbury charters, S 434 and S 435, then the end of the career of 'Æthelstan A' could be pushed back to 935; see Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations*.

‘Æthelstan A’

S 416 (Winchester, Old Minster)	12 November 931, Lifton	Æthelstan grants nine hides at Ham to Wulfgar, his <i>minister</i> .	Preserved as an original, single sheet. No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 417 (Winchester, Old Minster)	30 August 932, Milton	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at West Meon to Æthelgeard (or Æthelweard), his <i>minister</i> .	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 418a (Barking)	9 November 932, Exeter	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Bowers Gifford to Beorhtsige.	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 418 (Winchester, New Minster)	24 December 932, Amesbury	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at North Stoneham to Alfred, his <i>minister</i> .	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 419 (Shaftesbury)	24 December 932, Amesbury	Æthelstan grants eleven and a half hides at Fontmell to Shaftesbury Abbey.	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 379 (Winchester, New Minster)	11 January 933	‘Edward’ grants ten hides at Collingbourne Kingston to Wulfgar, his <i>minister</i> .	At some point, this diploma was altered in order to make it look as though it was issued by Edward. ^c Its formulation is typical of ‘Æthelstan A’, however.
S 422 (Sherborne)	26 January 933, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants ten hides at Bradford Abbas to the <i>familia</i> of Sherborne minster.	No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 423 (Sherborne)	26 January 933, Chippenham	Æthelstan grants five or eight hides at Stalbridge Weston to the church of Sherborne.	Basically authentic, but several suspicious features. ^d
S 425 (Canterbury, Christ Church)	28 May 934, Winchester	Æthelstan grants twelve hides at ?Durrington? to Ælfwald, his <i>minister</i> .	Preserved as an original single sheet. No reason to doubt authenticity.
S 407 (York)	7 June 934, Nottingham	Æthelstan grants land at Amounderness to the church of St Peter at York.	An authentic basis but there is evidence of some tampering. ^e
S 426 (Glastonbury)	13 September 934, Buckingham	Æthelstan grants fifteen hides at ?Kington St Michael? To Æthelhelm, his <i>minister</i> .	No reason to doubt authenticity.

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S 458 (Wilton)	924×39	Æthelstan grants twenty hides to Wulfsige, his <i>minister</i> , at Chilmark.	Incomplete diploma. No reason to doubt authenticity, but the extant material is insufficient for an accurate judgement.
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^a Kelly, *Selsey*, pp. 74–7.

^b Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 43 n. 74.

^c See Woodman, ‘“Æthelstan A” and the Rhetoric of Rule’, p. 248 n. 130; Miller, *New Minster*, pp. xxviii–xxx and 48.

^d O’Donovan, *Sherborne*, pp. 29–33; and Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 307.

^e Keynes *Diplomas*, p. 44 n. 78; and, ‘Regenbald the Chancellor [sic]’, p. 186 n. 4.

One man or many?

It seems a little strange, at first, to think that, at a time when England’s most powerful king was approaching the zenith of his considerable powers, just one person was charged with composing his charters. Yet, Stevenson, Drögereit, Chaplais and Keynes all made one common, critical, but as yet untested assumption: that ‘Æthelstan A’, the agency in sole charge of producing Æthelstan’s charters between 928 and 934, was a single person.¹⁰ There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the two ‘Æthelstan A’ charters which survive as single sheets were written in the same hand; secondly, similar formulae are used throughout his work. However, just because the same person was responsible for actually committing the text of the charters to vellum does not necessarily mean that he was the same individual from whose (somewhat overactive) imagination that text originated. Furthermore, the identification of consistent formulae could simply point to the use of a house style based on a formulary. Indeed, one of Keynes’s qualified criticisms of Drögereit’s work was that he failed to recognise that ‘the use of a particular formula was *not* the prerogative of a particular draftsman’.¹¹ Certainly, later in the tenth century several different individuals collaborated to produce the king’s charters, and even where charters shared formulae and other procedural features, there is good reason to think that they came about through reference to a shared formulary rather than as a result of the work of a single draftsman.¹² Could it have been the case, then, that ‘Æthelstan A’ was nothing more than a formulary: a series of formulae and diplomatic

¹⁰ ‘Æthelstan A’, it should be noted, was originally the name of the scribe, not of the agency responsible for drafting the charters. However, it has been used in the latter sense for at least the last three decades, and it is in this sense that it is used here.

¹¹ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 18, my italics.

¹² See pp. 000–000 below.

customs followed by a succession of different draftsmen who were all working from the same set of notes, and written down, on two occasions at least, by the same scribe? Resolving this question is a vital preliminary to any examination of the work of 'Æthelstan A': if 'he' cannot be firmly established as a single author, then any attempt to dissect 'his' prose style and shed light on 'his' background will be inherently flawed.

The best approach to this question is to examine the formulaic nature of the 'Æthelstan A' corpus: a highly formulaic, unimaginative and derivative corpus might suggest slavish imitation of an accepted norm as formulae were reused again and again without variation by different draftsmen who lacked the authority to alter the prose they were copying. Certainly, to some extent the 'Æthelstan A' charters are formulaic in this way. Several formulae were repeated precisely across a number of charters without any variation as though they were being copied from a formulary or a set of notes. However, closer inspection of the way in which formulae behave across the corpus suggests that something rather more sophisticated was going on, for it is possible to identify more or less subtle tweaks and changes being applied to repeated formulae. Each time they were used, these formulae retained their basic sense, but the language used to express that sense evolved in a manner consistent with the type II repetition described above (pp. 10–11). Comparison between thirteen 'Æthelstan A' sanctions (Table 6) demonstrates how the text was constructed from a series of related but slightly different formulae which evolved from one charter to the next.¹³

Table 6

Charter, date, archive	Sanction
S 399, 928, Glastonbury	Si autem quod non optamus evenerit aliquis superbiæ fastu afflatus avaritiæ fascibus succensus invidiæ dentibus armatus execrabile caput ut adsolet arrigere voluerit et huius meæ donationis et compositionis singrapham in aliquibus magnis vel modicis causis elidere infringere minuire vel aliquo casa sternendo delere conaverit intelligat se apud Judam proditorem pecuniæ injuste amatorem penarum æternarum mancipatorem.

¹³ Woodman has described and dissected the same process in a selection of 'Æthelstan A' diplomas: "'Æthelstan A" and the Rhetoric of Rule', pp. 236–45.

S 403, 930, Selsey

Si autem quod non optamus aliquis superbe
atque proterue flammium administrante
invidia afflatus spiritu euenerit hanc mee
compositionis ac confirmationis breuiculam
demere aut infringere et ad nihilum deducere
temptauerit, sciat se nouissima ac magna
examinationis die, tuba perstrepente archangeli,
bustis sponte dehiscentibus, somata diu corrupta
relinquentibus, elementis omnium creaturarum
pauelactis, cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio
sato filius perditionis dicitur eterna confusione
edacibus innumerabilium tormentorum flammis
perituum.

S 412, 931, Old Minster,
Winchester

Si autem quod non optamus aliquis diabolico
inflatus spiritu hanc mee compositionis ac
confirmationis breuiculam demere infringere ad
nichilum deducere temptauerit sciat se nouissima
ac magna examinationis die tuba prestrepente
archangeli bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata
diu fessa relinquentibus elementis omnium
creaturarum pauelactis cum Iuda proditore
qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur
eterna confusione edacibus innumerabilium
tormentorum [flammis] perituum.

S 413, 931, Abingdon

Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolico inflatus
spiritu hanc mee donationis breuiculam
infringere temptauerit, sciat se nouissima ac
magna examinationis die cum Iuda proditore
suisque impiis complicitibus eterna confusione
edaci bufa cherontis perituum flammis.

S 416, 931, Old Minster,
Winchester

Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolico
inflatus spiritu hanc mee compositionis ac
confirmationis breuiculam infringere vel elidere
temptauerit; sciat se nouissima ac magna
examinationis die stridula clangente archangeli
salpice bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata jam
rediviva relinquentibus elementis omnibus
pauelactis cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio
sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur æterna confusione
edacibus ineffabilium tormentorum flammis
perituum

S 417, 932, Old Minster,
Winchester

Si autem quod absit aliquis tippo supercilii
turgens hanc mee compositionis ac
confirmationis breuiculam elidere vel infringere
temptauerit. Sciat se nouissima ac magna
examinationis die classica clangente archangeli
salpicæ. Bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata
jam rediviva relinquentibus cum Iuda proditore
qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur
impiisque Judeis Christum blasfemantibus
æterna confusione edacibus ineffabilium
tormentorum flammis perituum.

S 418a, 932, Barking

Si aliquis autem quod absit diabolus inflatus spiritu hanc mee compositionis ac confirmationis breuiculam elidere uel infringere temptauerit sciat se nouissima ac magna examinationis die tuba perstrepente archangeli bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata iam rediuiua perpellentibus cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur impiisque Iudeis Christum blasphemantibus eterna confusione edacibus ineffabilium tormentorum flammis periturum.

S 418, 932, New Minster, Winchester; S 419, 932, Shaftesbury.

Si quis, quod absit, diabolico inflatus spiritu hanc mee composicionis ac confirmationis breuiculam demere uel infringere temptauerit, sciat se nouissima ac magna examinacionis die tuba perstrepente archangeli, bustis sponte dehiscentibus, somata diu fessa relinquentibus, elementis omnibus pauefactis, cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur eterna confusione edacibus ineffabilium tormentorum flammis periturum.

S 422 and S 423, 933, Sherborne

Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolica deceptus fraude hanc mee liberalitatis breuiculam in aliquo elidere uel impugnare temptauerit sciat se die tremende districtionis ultima clara reboante archangeli uoce cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato filius perditionis dicitur eterna dampnatione edacibus indicibilium tormentorum flammis arsurum.

S 425, 934, Christ Church, Canterbury

Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolico inflatus spiritu hanc meae compositionis ac confirmationis breuiculam elidere vel infringere temptauerit sciat se novissima ac magna examinationis die tuba perstrep[en]te archangeli bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata iam rediviva relinqventibus cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur ejusque complicitibus Iudeis Cristum blasphemantibus aeterna confusione edacibus ineffabilium tormentorum flammis periturum

S 407, 934, York

Si autem quod absit aliquis typo supercilii turgens hanc meae emptionis ac confirmationis breuiculam elidere vel infringere temptauerit sciat se novissima ac tremenda concionis die classica archangeli clangente buccina, somatibus tetra postponentibus poliandria, cum Iuda impii proditoris compilatore, infaustis quoque Judaeis Christum ore sacrilego ara in crucis blasphemantibus aeterna confusione edacibus favillantium tormentorum ignibus, sine fine poenaliter arsurum.

There are two forms of the phrase which introduces the sanction in these documents. One uses the verb *optamus* with a negative (*non*) and the other, introduced in 931, uses *absit*. The meaning is almost the same, but the words used to express it change. Moreover, these two phrases were not static; rather, the word order could be adjusted to fit the context in which the phrase occurred. For instance, S 399 has the verb *evenerit* inserted between *optamus* and *aliquis* in order to serve the coming phrase. The stock phrase (*si autem quod non optamus aliquis*) is completed, but the formula changes to fit in with the rest of the document.

There are further examples of this. For instance, all these charters suggest that the hypothetical breaker of their bounds might be in some way demonically inspired. The manner in which they go about doing this, however, evolves from one document to the next, as can be seen in three sanctions dating from 928, 931 and 932 (Table 7).

Table 7

S 399 (928, Glastonbury)	S 416 (931, Old Minster, Winchester)	S 417 (932, Old Minster, Winchester)
superbiae fastu afflatus avaritiae fascibus succensus ... arrigere voluerit et huius meae donationis et compositionis singrapham .	diabolico inflatus spiritu hanc meae compositionis ac confirmationis breviculam infringere vel elidere temptaverit.	tipho supercilii turgens hanc mee compositionis ac confirmationis breviculam elidere vel infringere temptaverit.

Here, the basic sense conveyed by the phrase *superbiae fastu afflatus* in S 399 is picked up by the words *diabolico inflatus spiritu* in S 416, and then by *tipho supercilii turgens* in S 417. Similarly, the word *compositionis* appears in all the documents, yet the context changes: in S 399 it is paired with *donationis* and in S 416 and S 417 with *confirmationis*. Even the word used for the charter itself changes: in S 399, the document is a *singrapha*; in the others, it is a *brevicula*. Although the words in these formulae changed, their meaning remained, in effect, the same.

S 399, S 416 and S 417 were written in different years. It is significant, however, that the same process of authorial variation is also visible in charters which were composed in the same year, as comparison between two charters written in the spring and early summer of 934 demonstrates (Table 8). The parts which changed are printed in bold.

In translation, these two sanctions, which were written a week and a half apart, would look quite similar, since there are very few substantial differences between their respective senses. However, the subtle evolution of their vocabulary and syntax means that they

Table 8

S 425 (28 May 934, CC Canterbury)	S 407 (7 June 934, York)
Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolico inflatus spiritu hanc meae compositionis ac confirmationis breviculam elidere vel infringere temptaverit sciat se novissima ac magna examinationis die tuba perstrep[en]te archangeli bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata iam rediviva relinqventibus cum Juda proditore qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis dicitur ejusque complicibus Judeis Cristum blasphemantibus aeterna confusione edacibus ineffabilium tormentorum flammis periturum.	Si autem quod absit aliquis typo supercilii turgens hanc meae emptionis ac confirmationis breviculam elidere vel infringere temptaverit sciat se novissima ac tremenda concionis die classica archangeli clangente buccina, somatibus tetra postponentibus poliandria, cum Juda impii proditoris compilatore, infaustis quoque Judaeis Christum ore sacrilego ara in crucis blasphemantibus aeterna confusione edacibus favillantium tormentorum ignibus, sine fine poenaliter arsurum.

look very different in Latin. In some cases, words were substituted for synonyms, or virtual synonyms, for no obvious reason: *flammis* ('flames') in S 425 for *ignibus* ('fires') in S 407 is a good example of this. Neither of these words is ostentatious or unusual; the sense does not change and nor does the syntax become any more refined or imposing; rather, this looks like change for change's sake. Much the same is true of the phrase *magna examinationis die tuba perstrep[en]te archangeli bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata iam rediviva relinqventibus* ('on the final and great day of examination, with the archangel's trumpet blaring, as the tombs burst open spontaneously being abandoned by the bones of those who had lain in them who have now been revived'), which becomes *tremenda concionis die classica archangeli clangente buccina, somatibus tetra postponentibus poliandria* ('on the final fearful day of judgement, with the war trumpet of the archangel sounding, with the dead emerging from their various tombs') in S 407. Here, *tuba* (trumpet) becomes *classica* (war trumpet); *perstrepente* (blaring) becomes *clangente* (sounding); *magna* (great) becomes *tremenda* (fearful); and so on. The sense is maintained almost exactly but the words used to express it are different. Whoever was writing these formulae clearly had no scruples whatsoever about altering the prose of his model.

Such authorial revisions did not happen at random, however. Usually, when two charters were issued on the same day (as in the case of S 399 and S 400, S 418 and S 419, and S 422 and S 423), they were virtually identical, with little of the tweaking that is visible in documents composed on different occasions.¹⁴ S 399 and S 400 were

¹⁴ Slight differences are, however, observable between the sanctions of S 422 and S 423,

so similar that Birch did not even print most of the former, instead referring the reader to the identical passages in S 400.¹⁵ This would seem to suggest that the text of the 'Æthelstan A' charters was not varied on a whim; rather, each time Æthelstan's court moved somewhere new, a new diplomatic template was produced which was then used for drafting that session's charters. This may have been intended as a mechanism for authenticating the charters. At any rate, whoever drew up that template was mindful of previous documents, but was also meticulous in altering their formulae in order to create something original. As S 425 and S 407 demonstrate, this happened even when charters were composed a few days apart.

The agency responsible for producing the template certainly had the authority to make subtle but significant alterations to the text of earlier charters each time the court moved and, moreover, was possessed of a formidable knowledge of Latin (and of a respectable, and presumably mobile, library).¹⁶ Yet, it is very significant that the template did not evolve at random. Instead, whenever it changed, it did so within the same parameters, lending the 'Æthelstan A' corpus a sense of overall consistency. Many of the variations within the corpus demonstrate the same taste for unusual and obscure vocabulary. The word *salpice* in the sanction formula in S 416, for example, is derived from the Greek, *σαλπιγς*, meaning 'trumpet'. In S 403 a Hebrew-derived word, *yduma*, was inserted into the conventional *regnante perpetualiter* formula (it is probably a form of the Hebrew word, *yadhayim*, meaning 'hands'). *Poliandria*, derived from Greek, *πολυανδριον*, appeared as part the sanction of S 407. Each of these highly unusual words represents evidence of authorial revision: each was used only once and, in each case, as part of a formula. It is possible that a precocious scribe may, once or twice, have inserted some rarefied glossary word into a standard formula in order to amuse himself; but it seems extremely unlikely that so many obscure words should have been inserted into otherwise run-of-the-mill formulae as consistently as they were unless the revisions were being planned by a single individual with a penchant for unusual vocabulary.

which were composed on 26 January 933 at Chippenham. Both charters record grants of land to Sherborne, where they were preserved. It is possible that 'Æthelstan A' altered his usual *modus operandi* in order to avoid having to grant two identical charters to a single archive. Woodman has credibly suggested that if (as seems likely) the charters were read out loud at the time of their donation, then 'Æthelstan A' may have altered their language slightly in order 'to provide a display of his literary ability': "'Æthelstan A" and the Rhetoric of Rule', p. 245.

¹⁵ BCS 664 and 663.

¹⁶ There was certainly no lack of books containing exotic literary texts at Æthelstan's court, which was probably the resource most easily accessible to 'Æthelstan A'. See below, pp. 000–000.

Moreover, a general analysis of the prose of the 'Æthelstan A' charters demonstrates the presence of several striking stylistic traits across the whole corpus. One of the two earliest extant 'Æthelstan A' charters, S 399, opens thus:

Afflante per cunctam triquadri orbis latitudinem gibonifero sacrosancti flaminis incendio salutifera animarum gaudia ac multifida donorum spiramina praerogante quibus humane inprobitatis rubigo consumitur.

With the fiery inferno of the Holy Breath blowing through the whole breadth of the three-cornered globe and bestowing salubrious joys on souls and manifold inspirations of gifts by which the blight of human wickedness is consumed.

The syntax here is sophisticated, to say the least; the sense block, *per cunctam triquadri orbis latitudinem*, is enclosed by the clause *afflante ... gibonifero sacrosancti flaminis incendio*, which would seem to mirror the sense of fiery envelopment being described. This is a microcosm of a larger pattern: the words *afflante*, *gibonifero* and *incendio* are all set far apart from each other, thus continuing the sense of fiery envelopment. Hyperbole is also visible in this passage: phrases such as *cunctam triquadri orbis latitudinem* and *gibonifero flaminis incendio* represent an attempt on the part of the author to find the most long-winded way of conveying a relatively simple idea.

A good comparison can be seen in the sanction of S 403 (which was written some years later), where 'Æthelstan A' can be seen at his angriest:

Si autem, quod non optamus, aliquis superbe atque proterue flammium administrante inuidia afflatus spiritu euenerit hanc mee compositionis ac confirmationis breuiculam demere aut infringere et ad nihilum deducere temptauerit, sciat se nouissima ac magna examinationis die, tuba perstrepende archangeli, bustis sponte dehiscentibus, somata diu corrupta relinquentibus, elementis omnium creaturarum pauefactis, cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato filius perditionis dicitur eterna confusione edacibus innumerabilium tormentorum flammis periturum.

If, however, that which we do not desire should happen, that somebody, puffed up with an arrogant spirit and with wanton, flame-vomiting envy attending him, should deny or infringe this short statement of my composition and confirmation and attempt to reduce it to nothing, let him know, on the final and great day of judgement, with the trumpet of the archangel blaring, the tombs bursting open of their own accord, those sleeping and corrupted leaving them, the elements of all creation terrified, with the traitor Judas, who, is called 'the son of perdition' by the religious seed of the Sower, will be about to perish in eternal confusion amongst the consuming flames of innumerable torments.

Once again, we see 'Æthelstan A' indulging somewhat unnecessarily

in extravagant hyperbole. The phrase *demere aut infringere et ad nihilum deducere temptauerit* takes the idea that somebody may contradict the charter and states it three times; in the phrase *edacibus innumerabilium tormentorum flammis periturum* this unfortunate individual is condemned to suffer not just in fires, but to 'perish in eternal confusion amongst the consuming flames of innumerable torments'. It is hard to miss the point. There is also an interesting enveloping of *innumerabilium tormentorum* with *edacibus ... flammis*, which is another example of the hyperbaton that was so typical of the style of 'Æthelstan A'. Again, he used this technique along with the idea of enveloping flames, just as he did in S 399.

Overall, regardless of the extent to which formulae within the 'Æthelstan A' corpus evolved, it is possible to see the same tastes for obscure vocabulary, hyperbaton, hyperbole and disconnected syntax throughout. By far the best explanation for all this is that 'Æthelstan A' was a single individual who, each time Æthelstan's court stopped in a new place and set about disposing of estates to loyal followers, had the authority to create a slightly different diplomatic template with which to record the transactions.

Vocabulary and sources

Establishing that 'Æthelstan A' was a single individual, as Keynes *et al.* had always assumed, raises the question: who was he? A close examination of the vocabulary he used and the sources on which he drew is a vital preliminary to building a picture of his identity.

Indeed, one of the many features of the 'Æthelstan A' corpus that makes it so remarkable is its extraordinary use of language. With a few notable exceptions, pre-tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters recycled more or less the same canon of diplomatic language; not only did 'Æthelstan A' introduce almost 150 words which had never been used in a charter before, but the kinds of words he used were often extremely obscure. Broadly speaking, these words fall into four categories; firstly, there are those which, in a non-diplomatic context, are quite run-of-the-mill, such as *candor*. Although these words had not been used in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic before, they were comparatively common in Anglo-Latin more broadly, and would probably not have presented most readers with too much of a challenge. In the second category are words such as *gubernamen*, which, while not so obscure as to be indecipherable, were comparatively rare. Generally, they seem to have been selected because they were slightly more obscure than a more conventional synonym. In the third category are the extremely rare, deliberately obscure words and portmanteaus, one of which, *cliuipparum*, still lacks an adequate interpretation. Finally, in the fourth

category, which overlaps to some extent with the third, there are those words which were transliterated from Greek or Hebrew (see Tables 14–17, pp. 112–24).

It is important to bear in mind that in no instance does the use by ‘Æthelstan A’ of a particular, unusual word prove absolutely that he had read the work of any of the authors who had used it previously. Some or all of these words could have been drawn from grammars, *excerpta* or glossaries. At the same time, though, ‘Æthelstan A’ must have read something: a Latin style as imposing as his could scarcely have been acquired without significant exposure to a range of highly sophisticated texts. Analysis of vocabulary, then, allows us to make informed guesses as to what these texts might have been.

To start with, the words *poliandria* (πολυανδριον) and *pantocrator* (παντοκράτωρ) may be informative. Both were comparatively rare in their transliterated forms in the West in the early Middle Ages. However, both were used in the Bonifatian correspondence, a collection of letters exchanged between St Boniface and his friends and disciples, much of which was written in an advanced style of Latin; such language, which was distinctly Aldhelmian, would certainly have appealed to ‘Æthelstan A’.¹⁷

Two other extremely unusual words, *tanaliter* and *gibonifero*, point in a different direction, towards Brittany. *Tanaliter* is, according to Michael Lapidge, ‘attested elsewhere only in the ... Saint-Omer Hymn’,¹⁸ a Latin poem which probably originated in ninth- or early tenth-century Brittany; Lapidge went further, suggesting that the presence of *tanaliter* in Æthelstan’s charter ‘establishes a clear link between the [Saint-Omer] hymn and Æthelstan’s chancery, a link which could be explained by the presence of Breton clerics in Æthelstan’s household’.¹⁹ The evidence of *gibonifero*, which also appeared (as *giboniferus*, the nominative masculine form) in the *Rubisca*,²⁰ another hymn with a strong Breton heritage, would seem to strengthen Lapidge’s argument.

The words *yduma* and *mancipator* are also interesting. Both were used in the A-text of the *Hisperica famina*; *yduma* was also used in the

¹⁷ On the textual history of Boniface’s letters, see Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 269. The close stylistic relationship between Aldhelm’s Latin and that of the Bonifatian correspondence has been highlighted by Andy Orchard, ‘Old Sources, New Resources: Finding the Right Formula for Boniface’, *ASE* 30 (2001): 15–38.

¹⁸ Michael Lapidge, ‘Schools, Learning and Literature in Tenth-Century England’, in *ALL*, pp. 1–47, at p. 21; and ‘Israel the Grammarian’, especially 94–5.

¹⁹ Lapidge, ‘Israel the Grammarian’, p. 95.

²⁰ On which see Janet Stevenson, ‘*Rubisca*, Hiberno-Latin and the Hermeneutic Tradition’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 36 (1992): 15–41.

poems *Lorica Gildae* and *Altus prosator*.²¹ These three texts were Irish in origin and it is possible that, just as with the Breton material, they travelled to Æthelstan's court in the rucksacks of visiting Irish scholars (such as Dub Innse, the bishop of Bangor, who returned to Ireland sometime before 939). Likewise, it is possible that the use by 'Æthelstan A' of *somatibus* indicates a link to the work of the ninth-century Irish philosopher, John Scottus Eriugena. Interestingly, a manuscript originally from Arras containing his *carmina* to Charles 'the Bald', in which John used the word, was in England at the beginning of the tenth century.²² As one of the foremost Hellenists of his age, and as an author of immensely sophisticated Latin (of which alliteration was a conspicuous feature), it is easy to see why John's work would have appealed to 'Æthelstan A'.²³

Whereas the manuscripts containing the Breton poems and the work of John Scottus Eriugena had probably arrived in England comparatively recently, the *Hisperica famina* and *Altus prosator* had been available in England for some time prior to the tenth century. Jane Stevenson noted that several words from *Altus prosator*, not including *yduma*, had found their way into Aldhelm's work.²⁴ While 'Æthelstan A' may have read these texts directly (and it is satisfying to reflect on whether the clotted, obscure and frustrating Latin of the *Hisperica famina*, in particular, may have given him a taste of his own medicine), it is equally likely that he could have drawn this vocabulary from other sources. In contrast, it is more likely that 'Æthelstan A' copied directly from the Saint-Omer Hymn, John Scottus Eriugena's *Carmina* and the *Rubisca*, which were presumably available at Æthelstan's court. However he accessed it, however, we may be certain that 'Æthelstan A' appreciated the rarity of such vocabulary, and that by using it he was

²¹ See Michael Herren, *The Hisperica Famina I: The A Text*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies. Studies and Texts 31 (Toronto, 1974); and 'The Authorship, Date of Composition and Provenance of the So-Called *Lorica Gildae*', *Ériu* 24 (1973): 35–51. For a discussion of the problems associated with the former, see Andy Orchard, 'The *Hisperica Famina* as Literature', *JML* 10 (2000): 1–40.

²² Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 223. See Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 167. For the poem, see Michael Herren, ed. and trans., *Carmina: Iohannis Scotti Eriugena*, SLH 12 (Dublin, 1993), p. 88.

²³ Scholarship on John Scottus Eriugena is dominated, perhaps unsurprisingly, by commentaries on his philosophy. However, there are several excellent discussions of his intellectual background and writing style. See, for instance: John Contreni, 'The Irish "Colony" at Laon during the Time of John Scottus', in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie: Laon, 7–12 juillet 1975*, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique 561 (Paris, 1977), pp. 59–67; Paul Dutton, 'Eriugena the Royal Poet', in *Jean Scot écrivain: actes du IVe colloque international, Montréal, 28 août–2 septembre 1983*, ed. Guy-H. Allard (Montreal, 1986), pp. 51–80; and most particularly Herren, *Carmina*, pp. 11–55.

²⁴ Jane Stevenson, 'Altus Prosator', *Celtica* 23 (1999): 326–68, especially pp. 360–4. For more on the Hiberno-Latin sources used by 'Æthelstan A', see Woodman, 'Æthelstan A' and the Rhetoric of Rule', pp. 225–30.

seeking to compose his own prose in the same ‘hermeneutic’ register as these texts.

The source used most consistently and flexibly by ‘Æthelstan A’, and that which we may be certain that he had read first hand, was the work of Aldhelm.²⁵ This is not in any way surprising: as discussed in the previous chapters, Aldhelm’s work cast a very long shadow indeed over Anglo-Saxon intellectual history, and his prose had been deliberately and precisely imitated by certain charter draftsmen since at least the beginning of the ninth century, often for political reasons. ‘Æthelstan A’, however, took the emulation of Aldhelm’s style to a different level altogether. As Tables 14–17 (pp. 112–24) demonstrate, more than half of the unprecedented vocabulary that ‘Æthelstan A’ used in his charters had also been used by Aldhelm. But ‘Æthelstan A’ did not just borrow Aldhelm’s vocabulary; he imitated him on every level, composing prose which was Aldhelmian in almost every respect. Arguably, the relationship between ‘Æthelstan A’ and Aldhelm provides the most valuable clue as to the background and education of our draftsman.

Background and education

Borrowing vocabulary is one thing; consciously and deliberately paraphrasing, quoting and imitating the style of another author are something else entirely. And ‘Æthelstan A’ paraphrased, quoted and imitated Aldhelm a good deal. For instance, the phrase *quasi peripsima quisquiliarum abiciens* from S 412 mirrors Aldhelm’s *uelut quisquiliarum peripsema respuens*, from the prose *De uirginitate* (ch. 10). In S 413, there is another paraphrase, *fastidiosam melancolie nausiam*, which seems to reflect Aldhelm’s *fetidam melancoliae nausiam* (ch. 32), again from the prose *De uirginitate*. Indeed, the *Fontes* database has identified, to date, more than twenty-five individual paraphrases of Aldhelm’s work in the ‘Æthelstan A’ corpus,²⁶ meaning that ‘Æthelstan A’ drew directly on Aldhelm’s work at least once, and sometimes more than once, in every one of his nineteen extant charters. It seems safe to say, then, that ‘Æthelstan A’ must have been extremely impressed by Aldhelm’s writing.

Evidence for the understanding of Aldhelm’s work in the charters of ‘Æthelstan A’ goes far beyond the occasional paraphrase and borrowing of obscure vocabulary, however. ‘Æthelstan A’ modelled his very style of writing on Aldhelm’s, switching into his literary mode

²⁵ Woodman has described the relationship between ‘Æthelstan A’ and Aldhelm in ‘“Æthelstan A” and the Rhetoric of Rule’, pp. 220–5.

²⁶ *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed August, 2014.

and using the same stylistic devices and syntactical constructs in an attempt not just to imitate him, but almost to synthesise his prose. In addition to the use of obscure vocabulary discussed above, three distinctive literary devices characterise the writing both of Aldhelm and of 'Æthelstan A': hyperbaton, hyperbole and alliteration. That both authors use these techniques in combination proves nothing in itself; it is the consistency with which they do so that is so striking. Listing every instance of each of these techniques in the work of 'Æthelstan A' and Aldhelm would fill a monograph in its own right, so Tables 9–11 contain a limited but illustrative selection.

Table 9 Hyperbaton

Aldhelm	'Æthelstan A'
Type I – simple	
divina priscorum prophetarum oracula (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 3)	cunctam triquadri orbis latitudinem (S 399, S 400)
Type II – interlaced	
catholicorum floridam uirginitatis gloriam (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 9)	somatibus tetra postponentibus poliandria (S 407)

Table 10 Hyperbole

Aldhelm	'Æthelstan A'
Type I – simple, two-word phrases with <i>et</i>, <i>ac</i> or <i>atque</i>	
disciplina et regularia (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 6)	compositionis ac confirmationis (S 403, S 405, S 417, S 425)
duplici et gemina (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 3)	inspirate atque inuente (S 405, S 418, S 422, S 423, S 426)
Type II – complex phrases	
nunc priscas historiographorum fabulas et cronographorum seriem (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 3)	aliquis superbe atque proterue flammiuoma administrante inuidia afflatus spiritu (S 403, S 405)
stridula vocum simphonia et melodiae cantilenaeeque carmine (<i>Epistola</i> V, to Heahfrith)	mellifluaque vernantium rosarum odoramina a bonis beatisque naribus inestimabiliter dulcia capiuntur (S 425, S 426)

Table 11 Alliteration

Aldhelm	‘Æthelstan A’
Type I – two words beginning with the same letter	
crudeliter coronaretur (<i>Epistola</i> IV, to Gerontius)	patrie procuratoribus (S 405, S 418, S 418a, S 419)
simili sententia (<i>Epistola</i> IV, to Gerontius)	prima parentali (S 399, S 400)
Type II – strings of three or more words beginning with the same letter	
Primitus pantorum procerum praetorumque pio potissimum paternoque praesertim privilegio panagericum poemataque passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes (<i>Epistola</i> V, to Heahfrith)	polorum praecepto paternali (S 399, S 400) conamine cum casibus (S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423)
Type III – alliterating patterns	
praelcelso puritatis fastigio fulminavit (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 47)	fastu afflatus avaritiae fascibus (S 399, S 400)
mediocribus consulens et contritis corde ultro misereri (prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , ch. 43)	felicitatis illectus fastidiunt iam infima (S 407, S 425, S 426) pro percipiendis semperque specie (S 407, S 425, S 426) complicibus eterna confusione edaci (S 413)

Of course, Aldhelm was not the only Latin author ever to have used these techniques and he was not the only source from which ‘Æthelstan A’ could have learned them.²⁷ Nevertheless, hyperbaton, hyperbole and alliteration, often used in combination, are extremely prominent features of Aldhelm’s prose (and are even more prominent in his verse).²⁸ Considering the extent to which ‘Æthelstan A’ quoted and paraphrased Aldhelm, he must have been familiar with his work first hand. It seems likely, then, that ‘Æthelstan A’ also learned these techniques from Aldhelm and, in using them himself, sought to make his own writing look and feel like Aldhelm’s.²⁹

However, the extent to which ‘Æthelstan A’ was familiar with Aldhelm requires qualification, for his knowledge of Aldhelm’s work is dominated by quotation of one single text: the prose *De uirginitate*.

²⁷ Aldhelm’s influence on subsequent Anglo-Latin literature was profound: his legacy is summed up concisely by Orchard in ‘Old English and Latin Poetic Traditions’, pp. 73–5.

²⁸ On which see Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*; and Winterbottom, ‘Aldhelm’s Prose Style and its Origins’.

²⁹ Compare with David Woodman’s comments, ‘“Æthelstan A” and the Rhetoric of Rule’, p. 220.

Altogether, there are six identified paraphrases from the *Carmen ecclesiastica*, the *Enigmata*, *Epistola V* and the verse *De uirginitate* in the work of 'Æthelstan A'; there are at least twenty from the prose *De uirginitate*. Of Aldhelm's work, it was the prose *De uirginitate* that 'Æthelstan A' knew (or liked) best. Certainly, it was this work that he used with the most flexibility and frequency.³⁰

It is possible that, at the end of the 920s, 'Æthelstan A' had been only recently acquainted with Aldhelm and the prose *De uirginitate*, as he presumably had been with the Saint-Omer Hymn and the *Rubisca*. However, his relationship with the latter texts was characterised by the occasional borrowing of unusual vocabulary, not by a wholesale attempt to imitate their prose style. For 'Æthelstan A' to quote, paraphrase and imitate Aldhelm to the extent that he did suggests a much older, more profound, and more flexible knowledge of his work. This, then, may give an important clue to his background and education: he must have received his training at a centre where the work of Aldhelm and, in particular, the prose *De uirginitate* was available. Moreover, that centre must have sustained very high educational and scribal standards during the first two decades of the tenth century and, perhaps, the last decade of the ninth, when the young 'Æthelstan A' would have been studying.

There were probably several centres in England that might have fulfilled these criteria; Winchester, with its New Minster and important connections to the West Saxon royal dynasty, was probably one; Glastonbury might have been another.³¹ However, given Æthelstan's close links to Mercia, and in light of the ill-feeling towards him at Winchester, placing 'Æthelstan A' (who must have been one of the king's most trusted courtiers, and who certainly showed no compunction in describing Æthelstan's royal status in the most exalted terms) in Wessex seems unsatisfactory. A more likely centre, therefore, is Worcester. A major ecclesiastical hub at the heart of Æthelstan's Mercian powerbase, Worcester was described by Michael Lapidge as a place, 'unscathed by the Viking incursions', where a sizeable library clearly survived more or less intact, and where scribal standards were maintained.³² It is in keeping with this picture, then, that a style of

³⁰ A copy of the prose *De uirginitate* written in a similar square minuscule hand to that used in the extant 'Æthelstan A' single sheets, and containing heavy, apparently contemporary, glossing is London, BL, Royal 7.D.xxiv. See Scott Gwara, ed., *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de Virginitate cum glosa Latina atque AngloSaxonica*, CCSL cxxiv, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2001), pp. 123–4.

³¹ Having discussed a possible connection between the Royal manuscript containing the prose *De uirginitate* and 'Æthelstan A', Woodman wondered whether 'Æthelstan A' might have spent some time at Glastonbury, where the Royal manuscript may have been written: "'Æthelstan A" and the Rhetoric of Rule', pp. 222–3 and 228–30.

³² Lapidge, 'Schools, Learning and Literature', p. 6. See also David Dumville, 'English Script in the Second Half of the Ninth Century', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies*

diplomatic Latin had appeared at Worcester in the late 880s which, with its taste for unprecedented, obscure vocabulary and complicated syntactical structures, clearly prefigured that of 'Æthelstan A'.³³ Two extant charters, which probably drew on an earlier Mercian taste for writing Aldhelmian Latin in charters, bear witness to this style: S 217 and S 346, which date from 887 and 889 respectively. Both were produced at Worcester and were preserved in the archive there.³⁴ S 346, which is by far the more complex of the two, records the grant of an estate and commercial privileges in London to Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, from Alfred and *ealdorman* Æthelred.

There are a few verbal echoes of 'Æthelstan A' in this document: the *si ... non optamus* phrase which begins the sanction, for instance, was also used by him (although it was not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic more generally); also, the phrase *serpentino suggestionis demonice toxico inflate* is reminiscent of comparable phrases from the 'Æthelstan A' corpus (for instance: *aliquis diabolico inflatus spiritu* from S 407). Much more striking, though, is the whole approach to charter-draftsmanship taken in S 346: bizarre, archaic and pretentious vocabulary (*tramitis, herebica, machera, Phoebum*), complex alliterating patterns (*nebulæ neglegentiarum nubiferis; persone maioris minorisve potestatis*), hyperbole (*celorum celsitudinem, turbidam discordiæ rabiem*) and hyperbaton (*almifica caelestini luminis gemma*) all combine in a formidable display of rhetorical gymnastics. Importantly, these were precisely the same techniques that 'Æthelstan A' used; and, moreover, there is every reason to believe that the draftsman of S 346 also learned them from Aldhelm, specifically from the prose *De uirginitate*. Several phrases in S 346 look like paraphrases, if not direct quotations, from this text (Table 12). It is noticeable, moreover, that much of the obscure or unusual vocabulary used in S 346 was also used by Aldhelm, with a strong bias towards the prose *De uirginitate* (Table 13).

Probably, the prose *De uirginitate* was as important for the author of S 346 as it would be for 'Æthelstan A'. Confirmation, if confirmation were needed, that the prose *De uirginitate* played an important part in the intellectual life of late ninth-century Worcester comes in the form

in *Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, Toronto Old English Series 14, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols (Toronto, 2005), 1, pp. 305–25, especially pp. 317–18.

³³ Much the same sentiments were expressed by Michael Lapidge and Mechthild Gretsch: see Lapidge, 'Schools, Learning and Literature', p. 10 n. 25; and Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, p. 342.

³⁴ It is possible, though not certain, that S 193 and S 197 were also at Worcester by the end of the ninth century. I have discussed these charters in more detail elsewhere: see Snook, 'When Aldhelm Met the Vikings'. Also, see above, pp. 32–6.

Table 12

S 346	Aldhelm, prose <i>De uirginitate</i>
litteratoriis apicibus	litterarum apicibus
caraxantis stilo	stilo historiae caraxare
crucis vexillo	vexillo cruces
virginalis pudicitiae	virginalis pudicitia

Table 13

Word in S 346	Frequency in Aldhelm	Frequency in prose <i>De uirginitate</i>
anathema	1	1
canitiae	1	1
caraxantis	6	5
decrepita	5	4
machera	11	8
misticus	11	6
trophicus	2	1

of a manuscript containing the text which was very probably written and was certainly preserved at Worcester at this time.³⁵

It seems likely, then, that 'Æthelstan A' received at least some of his education at Worcester. Whilst there, he could have had access to large (and probably ancient) book collections, which included the prose *De uirginitate*, and benefited from educational institutions which had remained largely undamaged by the Vikings. Moreover, it was also the only place in England where he could certainly have encountered an approach to charter draftsmanship which clearly inspired his own. Perhaps he had read S 217 and S 346; it is hard to believe that he was completely ignorant of them, or at least of the mentality which produced them. It is also highly unlikely that he was unaware of the long-established, Mercian habit of incorporating Aldhelm's work into the prose of their charters. It seems only right, then, that 'Æthelstan A' should take his place at the head of a long line of great literary names, including the likes of Shakespeare, George Eliot, W. H. Auden and Philip Larkin, to have hailed from the West Midlands.

³⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Harley 5.f.iii. See Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 462, p. 81.

Bishop Ælfwine of Lichfield

'Æthelstan A' was, putting it simply, the foremost Anglo-Latinist of his time. Nobody else in the 920s and 930s, even in Æthelstan's chancery, wrote so much Latin in such a sophisticated style. It is frustrating, then, that this remarkable author remains anonymous, especially when it is considered that, on the continent, the business of identifying scribes, notaries and chancellors is often comparatively straightforward.³⁶ It may be that 'Æthelstan A' was a shy, retiring individual who kept himself to himself and, preferring the seclusion of a draughty cloister to the raucous bustle of the court, would have been quite happy with his anonymity. His effervescent prose style, though, suggests otherwise. Perhaps we owe it to him, therefore, at least to make an intelligent guess as to who he might have been.

In speculating about the identity of 'Æthelstan A', Sarah Foot and Simon Keynes have been the most recent of several scholars to note that Ælfwine, bishop of Lichfield, was consistently placed first amongst the bishops in the witness lists of the 'Æthelstan A' charters, a much higher position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy than his episcopal rank would normally allow.³⁷ Fittingly for somebody who may have been responsible for writing such accomplished prose, Ælfwine had a big ego: in S 416, which survives as an original single sheet, the *ego* of his subscription is written in letters which are noticeably larger than the rest. Lichfield was an important Mercian see, sixty kilometres or so from Worcester; Ælfwine's episcopate, 903×915–935×41,³⁸ cannot be dated with much certainty, but it does coincide with the career of 'Æthelstan A'; if we take 935 as its terminus, then it coincides very neatly indeed.

There is more evidence to support the case for Ælfwine. S 225 is a document giving permission to Eadric, a *minister*, to purchase land from a certain Wulflaf (it is reproduced in Appendix III). Preserved at Abingdon, it was granted in the name of Æthelflæd of Mercia in 915. Although the charter is not without its problems, Susan Kelly, its most recent editor, considered it basically authentic.³⁹ Significantly, Bishop Ælfwine appeared third on the witness list, below Æthelflæd and her daughter Ælfwynn (whom the thirteenth-century copyist, presumably confusing her with Ælfwine, has promoted to the somewhat improbable rank of *episcopus*), and above Bishop Æthelhun of Worcester. The language of this charter is not as sophisticated as

³⁶ See p. 2 n. 5 above. Also: Tock, *Scribes, souscripteurs et témoins*, pp. 83–108 and 271–308.

³⁷ Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 72; and Keynes, 'Church Councils', p. 55.

³⁸ See Ælfwine 8 in *PASE*.

³⁹ Kelly, *Abingdon*, no. 20.

that used by 'Æthelstan A', but there are some interesting stylistic flourishes. Complex alliterating patterns (*tociusque telluris; sancti spiritus ex sacratissimo; cuius imperio cuncta obtemperant celestia*) and the presence of some unusual and unprecedented vocabulary (*umbratione, infernalina, eclypsi, prosiliens, obtemperant, gubernacula, nitescunt*) look out of place. Interestingly, the word *eclypsi* has a Greek origin (ἔκλειψις), which the author emphasised by the use of a 'y' instead of the more usual 'i'. Two paraphrases of Aldhelm's work are also striking: the first, *mundi qui sceptrata regit* resembles Aldhelm's *sceptrata regens mundi*, from the *Enigmata*. The second is more interesting: *ex sacratissimo prosiliens uirginis aluo* in S 225 is reminiscent of Aldhelm's *sacratæ virginis* and *ex virginis aluo* from chapters 35 and 39 respectively of his prose *De uirginitate*, the favourite text of 'Æthelstan A'. Also, the phrase *umbratione conceptioneque sancti spiritus* resembles *umbratio Spiritus Sancti* from Ambrose's *De sacramentis* (1.6.22). The author of S 225, like 'Æthelstan A', was clearly keen to show off his learning and, moreover, to demonstrate his knowledge of the work of Aldhelm. Overall, it is extremely interesting that a Latin style with so many obvious similarities to that used by 'Æthelstan A' a decade later was employed in a charter in which the name of Bishop Ælfwine featured prominently in the witness list. The simplest conclusion would be that S 225 was drafted by Bishop Ælfwine and that it represented an early stage in the development of the style that would blossom so spectacularly in the work of 'Æthelstan A' in the 920s.

Almost fifteen years later, in 929, Ælfwine was present on a diplomatic mission to Germany, accompanying Æthelstan's sister, Edith, as she sought marriage to Otto (destined to become Otto 'the Great'), the son of the Emperor Henry 'the Fowler'. His name, as *Elwinus eps.*, was recorded in the Sankt Gallen *Liber Vitæ*.⁴⁰ Perhaps it is significant that at least one 'Æthelstan A' charter survives from every year between 928 and 934 except 929, the year of the mission to Germany. S 399 and S 400 date from 16 April 928; S 403 from 3 April 930, almost exactly two years apart. This would have given Ælfwine plenty of time to get to and from Henry's court.

Moreover, a striking feature of the 'Æthelstan A' charters is the precision with which they were dated and located. There had never been a standard way of doing this in England; as a result, few extant charters gave the precise date and location of the act of donation they recorded. Even in Æthelstan's reign, the exact date and place were not noted down consistently. Unusually, however, every 'Æthelstan

⁴⁰ Paul Piper, ed., *Libri confraternitatum Sancti Galli Augiensis Fabariensis*, MGH (Berlin, 1884), p. 100, col. 332; for a discussion and a photograph of the relevant page of the manuscript, see Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', p. 200.

A' charter recorded, without exception, the exact day when and place where the grant was made.

There is an important difference, though, between the dating and locating procedures used in the two earliest 'Æthelstan A' charters (S 399 and S 400, both from 928) and the rest (produced from 930 onwards). In the earlier documents, the date and location of the grant are split apart. Firstly, the date is given in the dispositive section:

Ego Adelstanus donifluo Dei gubernamine rex Anglorum. Anno dominicæ incarnationis DCCCC XXVIII mei haut dubium regiminis tercio Indictione I epacta XXVI XVI idus Maii luna XXI.

Then, fifteen lines later, following the bounds of the estate and the sanction, immediately before the witness list, the place (Exeter, in the case of S 399 and S 400) is mentioned:

Haec siquidem scedula tempore paschali in arce regia quæ calatur Exceaster rege Adelstano suos subregulos, episcopos, duces, iudices, proceres, dignitates, gaudio cum magno Pascendo, flexu articulorum depicta est.

The details are all there, certainly, but not as part of the same coherent section. In all subsequent 'Æthelstan A' charters, however, the dating and locating clauses became a great deal tighter and more formulaic. The information was all together and, unusually for 'Æthelstan A', a formula was carefully followed each time one was written. S 407 is a good example:

anno incarnationis dominicæ DCCCCXXX regni vero mihi commissi VI, indictione VII, epacta III, concurrente II, septimis Junii idibus luna XXXI, in civitate omnibus notissima quæ Snotingham dicitur.

A comparison with contemporary dating and locating procedures followed by the chancery of Henry 'the Fowler' throws up some interesting comparisons.⁴¹ On 16 September 929, while the Anglo-Saxon delegation of which Ælfwine was a part might well have been in Germany, Henry's court was at Quedlingburg. A charter was drawn up there, the dating clause of which is typical of contemporary German practice:

Data XVI. kal. octob. Anno dominicæ incarnationis DCCCCXXVIII, indictione II, anno autem X. Heinrici gloriosi regis regni; actum in loco qui dicitur Quitlingaburg; in dei nomine feliciter amen.⁴²

⁴¹ On the evolution of the language used in dating charters, see Benoît-Michel Tock, 'L'étude du vocabulaire et la datation des actes: l'apport des bases de données informatisées', in *Dating Unedited Medieval Charters*, ed. Michael Gervers (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 81–96.

⁴² Theodore von Sickel, ed., *Diplomatum Regum et Imperatorum Germaniæ I: Conradi I. Heinrici I. et Ottonis I Diplomata*, MGH (Hanover, 1879–1884), no. 20.

Both the Anglo-Saxon and the German dating clauses give extremely precise information as to where and when the transaction took place and, significantly, both use the indiction as a dating tool.⁴³ Both also use a variation on the phrase *qui dicitur* (*quae dicitur* in the case of the English document) in referring to the place where the grant was made. Moreover, the order in which the dating and locating are done is similar in both: the year is given first in terms of the incarnation; then in terms of the indiction; then, finally, the place is named.

The German and English procedures are by no means identical: the 'Æthelstan A' dating clauses tend, as we might expect, to be rather more verbose than their German counterparts. Also, the German dating clauses were usually placed after the witness list, whereas 'Æthelstan A' placed them immediately before it. It is striking, though, that the dating clauses written by 'Æthelstan A' after 929 looked similar to their German equivalents and, perhaps more importantly, were quite different from the two he wrote in 928. It is possible that Ælfwine, impressed by what he had seen of Henry's chancery, implemented some of its practices on his return to England.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that we will ever know the identity of 'Æthelstan A' for certain. If compelled to name him, though, Bishop Ælfwine (or, perhaps, somebody in his retinue) seems like the best option. As bishop of Lichfield, he was probably a Mercian and, as such, could very well have been educated at Worcester. Whilst there, he would have come into contact with the impressive diplomatic tradition of that house; he may have encountered S 346, or other charters like it, in the archive. He would also have had access to Worcester's library, which included Aldhelm's prose *De uirginitate*. Moreover, Ælfwine would likely have been somebody in whom the king, in decidedly uncertain times, could place his trust. Æthelstan had been raised

⁴³ Originally, the indiction was a fifteen-year cycle used to calculate agricultural land tax in the Roman Empire during the third century. By the late fourth century, the indiction was being used to date documents throughout the Mediterranean. Bede was aware of it, and declared – contrary to the Eastern method of calculating it – that the first day of the cycle was 24 September. It was known in Anglo-Saxon England and, moreover, was used in dating charters from an early stage: S 8, the earliest extant original charter from England used it, for instance. However, it fell out of fashion and was not used consistently to date charters in England until the reign of Æthelstan. For a general discussion of the indiction, see Leo Depuydt, 'AD 297 as the Beginning of the First Indiction Cycle', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 24 (1987): 137–9. See also Kenneth Harrison, *Framework of Anglo-Saxon History* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 65–75; and Yiannis E. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions*, *Meletēmata* 17 (Athens, 1992), pp. 32–4.

in Mercia and maintained significant support there throughout his reign. It is quite possible that Ælfwine and Æthelstan were roughly the same age; at any rate, given Ælfwine’s position, they would surely have known each other before Æthelstan became king. There is good evidence that, later in the tenth century, Anglo-Saxon kings put the production of their charters in the hands of trusted ecclesiastics. It makes sense that Æthelstan, too, should have entrusted his writing office to a man he knew well, who was a Mercian, and who may even have been his friend. The confidence with which ‘Æthelstan A’ wrote certainly suggests that he felt secure in his position.

Whatever else he might have been, there is no doubt that ‘Æthelstan A’ was a formidable Latinist. It is easy to condemn him as a mimic, to see him as a capable writer but, ultimately, as an imitator of Aldhelm’s style, and as an interpreter of a long-standing Mercian custom of adapting Aldhelm’s prose in charters, rather than an innovator in his own right. To do so, though, seems unfair. As discussed in the previous chapter, Æthelstan’s ideological imperative was not innovation but reinvention. ‘Æthelstan A’ used Aldhelm as his stylistic model not because he lacked imagination, but because his source represented the very pinnacle of Anglo-Saxon intellectual achievement. By writing like him, he located his prose within a long-established Anglo-Latin tradition, unambiguously associating Æthelstan’s reign with one of Anglo-Saxon England’s most famous writers as he did so. Yet, at the same time, ‘Æthelstan A’ was certainly not oblivious to modern fashions: by utilising language from the Saint-Omer Hymn, the *Rubisca*, the *Hisperica famina* and so on, he clearly responded to the vibrant, cosmopolitan culture of Æthelstan’s court. His writing, perhaps more than the work of any other author, records the moment at which the native Anglo-Saxon tradition of ‘hermeneutic’ Latin began to assimilate the continental and Celtic influences that would transform it into the much more contemporary style that came into fashion in the 960s. The charters that ‘Æthelstan A’ wrote were exciting, engaging and vivacious. They still carried out their basic legal function, but they did so with style and flamboyance that spoke of the new-found self-confidence at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon state. They were, in the same moment, powerful invocations of the culture of the past and witty studies in contemporary Latinity. More than anything, they proved beyond doubt that Æthelstan’s court was *the* place to be in tenth-century Europe.

Appendix: Vocabulary used by 'Æthelstan A'

In the following tables, the Sawyer numbers in **bold** indicate that the word was used as part of the same formula in each of the charters; those in ***bold italic*** indicate that the word was used in a similar context but as part of a different formula. The charters given in brackets and marked with an asterisk purport to predate the work of 'Æthelstan A' but are generally agreed to be forgeries. Each word is given in the form in which 'Æthelstan A' used it.

Table 14 Category I (common words, but unprecedented in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic)

Word	Used in	Comments
abominando	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419	Common word.
administrationum	S 399, S 400	Common word.
adquiritur	S 399, S 400	Common word.
afflante	S 399, S 400	Common word.
amacabili	S 399, S 40	Common word.
ammonent	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423 (S 22*, S 136*)	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
ancipiti	S 399, S 400	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (2 <i>De metris</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola V</i> ; 1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
arrigere	S 399, S 400	Common word; used once in Aldhelm (<i>De metris</i>).
arva	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word.
asperrimae	S 399, S 400	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>).
blasphemantibus	S 407, S 418a, S 425, S 426	Relatively common in medieval Latin; used once by Aldhelm in the same form (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); also used in Vulgate Leviticus 24.11 and Matthew 9.3 and 26.65.
buccina	S 379, S 407, S 1604	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; <i>De metris</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola IV</i>).

bustis	S 403, S 405, S 412, S 416, S 1604	Common word; used once by Aldhelm in the same form (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
candentia	S 403	Common word.
candore	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word.
clangente	S 379, S 407, S 416, S 417, S 423, S 426, S 1604	Common word; used sixteen times by Aldhelm.
clarescit	S 379, S 403, S 405, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423, S 425, S 458 (S 167*, S 232*, S 358*, S 376*)	Common word; used nineteen times by Aldhelm.
compilatore	S 407, S 423	Common word.
conamine	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
corruptelæ	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
decurribilis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word; used eighteen times by Aldhelm.
detestande	S 403, S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
dilabitur	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word.
dilacerat	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word in the Middle Ages; used once by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); Augustine, Cassiodorus, Venantius Fortunatus etc.
dulcescunt	S 407, S 425, S 426	Relatively common, though poetic word; used once in Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>); elsewhere by Paulinus of Nola (<i>Carmina</i>), Pliny (<i>Historia Naturalis</i>) etc.
edacibus	S 403, S 405, S 407, S 412, S 413, S 379, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 1604 (S 250*, S 358*)	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
elegantissimam	S 399, S 400	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 <i>Epistola</i> IV).
elementis	S 403, S 412; S 416, S 418	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola</i> II).

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elidere	S 379, S 399, S 400, S 407, S 416, S 417, S 418a, S 422, S 423	Common word; used ten times by Aldhelm.
euadentem	S 403, S 405	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 prose <i>De</i> <i>uirginitate</i>).
examinationis	S 379, S 399, S 400, S 403, S 405, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 423, S 425, S 426 (S 22*, S 83, S 90*, S 250*)	Common word.
faculis	S 423 (S 228*)	Relatively common word; used six times by Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 5 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); Vulgate (Apocalypse).
fastidiosam	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
fellita	S 405, S 412, S 418, S 419	Common word; used eight times by Aldhelm (2 <i>De</i> <i>metris</i> ; 3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
fessa	S 405, S 412, S 418, S 419, S 1604	Common word; used eight times by Aldhelm (2 <i>De</i> <i>metris</i> ; 3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
figens	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 422, S 423 (S 124*, S 229*)	Common word; used seven times by Aldhelm (3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i> ; 3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
fletibus	S 399, S 400	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
flexu	S 399, S 400, S 407, S 412, S 416, S 417	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De</i> <i>uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>).
forcipis	S 399, S 400, S 405	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De</i> <i>uirginitate</i>).
fortiter	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
gemende	S 399, S 400, S 403, S 405	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De</i> <i>uirginitate</i>).

grex	S 422	Common word; used six times by Aldhelm (3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>)
homunculis	S 403, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 458	Relatively common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 <i>De metris</i>) and by Sulpicius Severus.
ierarchia	S 379, S 407, S 417, S 418a, S 423, S 425, S 426	Relatively common word; ultimately derived from Greek ιερακτιον, though certainly not in the first instance, here.
imbecillitatis	S 403	Common word.
immarcescibilium	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Relatively common word; used twice by Aldhem (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>); Paulinus of Nola (<i>Carmina</i>).
impudenter	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word.
impugnare	S 422	Common word.
inaccessibili	S 403	Common post-classical word.
incendio	S 399, S 400	Common word; used fourteen times by Aldhelm.
infaustis	S 407, S 423	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>).
interiacente	S 418, S 419, S 423	Common word.
invectionis	S 399, S 400	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
iocunditatem	S 379, S 413, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423 (S 376*, S 377*)	Common word.
jubilationis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
lacrimosa	S 399, S 400	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
lacteo	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word.
laetitiae	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).

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latratibus	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
liliorum	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 436, S 458	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>).
limam	S 399, S 400	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
medicamina	S 399, S 400	Common word; used seven times by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Carmen Ecclesiastica</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola IV</i>).
monilium	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word.
mordaciter	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word.
multifida	S 399, S 400	Common word.
naribus	S 407, S 418a, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word; used once in Aldhelm (1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
naturaliter	S 399, S 400	Common word; used eight times in Aldhelm (5 <i>De metris</i> ; 3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
nausiam	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 422, S 423	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
ocellorum	S 379, S 403, S 407, S 412, S 417, S 418a, S 425, S 458	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (1 <i>De metris</i> ; 2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i>).
odibilis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word.
optabilia	S 403, S 405	Common word.
ouantibus	S 403, S 405, S 418, S 418a, S 419 (S 393*)	Common word; used six times by Aldhelm (4 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola V</i> ; 1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i>).
pallore	S 399, S 400	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).

paradigmate	S 399, S 400, S 418	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>).
peccamina	S 399, S 400, S 403, S 405	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (1 <i>De metris</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
percelebrent	S 419	Common word.
peripsema	S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Common word in medieval Latin; used three times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
perpellentibus	S 418a	Common word.
perpessurum	S 399, S 400	Common word.
perstrepente	S 403, S 405, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 425	Common word.
poenaliter	S 407	Common word.
postposita	S 399, S 400	Common word.
rediviva	S 416, S 417, S 425	Common late Latin word; used five times by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>); unusually versatile in meaning; used by Prudentius about Christ and Vitruvius about building materials.
remediabilibus	S 399, S 400	Common word.
rimatur	S 403, S 405	Common word; used fourteen times by Aldhelm.
rosarum	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 <i>De metris</i>).
rubigo	S 399, S 400	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (1 <i>De metris</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
salutifera	S 399, S 400	Common, though poetic word; used seven times by Aldhelm (5 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 5 <i>De metris</i> ; 1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
sensum	S 403, S 405	Common word; used thirteen times by Aldhelm.
serpens	S 399, S 400	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 <i>De metris</i>).

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sinceritatis	S 403, S 405	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 <i>De metris</i>).
singrapham	S 399, S 400 (S 245*, S 246*)	Common word.
splendida	S 339, S 400	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i>).
sternendo	S 403, S 405	Common word; used twelve times by Aldhelm.
stridula	S 416, S 1604	Common word; used once by Aldhelm (1 <i>Epistola V</i>).
suavia	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word; used six times by Aldhelm (2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
succensus	S 399, S 400, S 423	Common word; used sixteen times by Aldhelm.
summopere	S 407, S 425, S 426 (S 117*)	Common word.
supercilii	S 407, S 417, S 426	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola IV</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola V</i>).
suppellectilibus	S 399, S 400	Common medieval Latin word.
tormentorum	S 379, S 403, S 405, S 407, S 412, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423, S 425, S 426	Common word; used thirty-two times by Aldhelm.
transcendente	S 403, S 405	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i> ; 1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
truculenter	S 399, S 400 (S 51*)	Common word.
tuba	S 403, S 405, S 412, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 425	Common word; used five times by Aldhelm (2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i> ; 2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
venenosis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Common word; used twice by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
vernantium	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Common word (with poetic connotations).
victualibus	S 399, S 400	Common word.
virulenta	S 399, S 400	Common word; used ten times by Aldhelm.

voraginem	S 412, S 416, S 417	Common word; used four times by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
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Table 15 Category II (rare words)

Word	Used in	Comments
abiciens	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423 (S 22*)	A relatively unusual word. Used by Flodoard of Rheims (<i>Annales</i>) and, later, by Liutprand of Cremona (<i>Episcopi relatio</i>).
boantis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	A relatively unusual word. Used by Gregory of Tours (<i>Historia Francorum</i>); used once in Aldhelm in the same form, <i>boantis</i> (<i>Epistola ad Acircium</i>).
convolatu	S 407, S 412, S 417, S 425, S 458	A relatively unusual word. Used once in Aldhelm (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); Terence (<i>Comediae</i>); Gildas (<i>De excidio Britanniae</i>).
debacchando	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 434, S 458	Used by Horace (Odes) and Terence (<i>Comedia</i>); more common in Middle Ages; used once in Aldhelm (prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
destillatione	S 399, S 400	A comparatively rare word; used by Tertullian (<i>Liber de anima</i>) and Arnobius the Elder (<i>Disputationum aduersus gentes</i>), Pliny (<i>Historia naturalis</i>) and Isidore (<i>Etymologiae</i>).
[h]ejulando	S 399, S 400; S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Used by Gregory of Tours (<i>De miraculis S Martini</i>), Flodoard of Rheims (<i>De Christi triumphis</i>); <i>hejulo</i> used in Vulgate (Job) and Prudentius (<i>Liber peristephanon</i>).
elucubratione	S 403, S 405 (S 358*, S 376*)	Rare in classical Latin but relatively common in the Middle Ages; used twice by Aldhelm (1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola</i> I).

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flammiuoma	S 403, S 405 (S 68*)	Unattested in classical Latin, but relatively common in the Middle Ages; used four times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>); used elsewhere by Martianus Capella, Juvenius, Prudentius, Boniface, Alcuin, Patrick, Felix, etc.
flebilis	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Unusual word; used three times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); Ovid (<i>Ars amatoria</i>); Paulinus of Nola (<i>Carmina</i>); pseudo-Augustine.
fulcimentum	S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 1604	Rare, late Latin word; used four times by Aldhelm (2 <i>De metris</i> ; 2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>); Macrobius (<i>Saturnalia</i>).
indefectiva	S 407, S 425, S 426	Rare late Latin form; used by Bede (<i>Homilia XVIII: In natale Jacobi</i> ; <i>Epistola VI</i>) and Rabanus Maurus amongst others.
indempte	S 413, S 422	Rare word; used by Cassiodorus (<i>Variarum</i>); Æthilwulf (<i>De abbatibus</i>) and Flodoard of Rheims (<i>De Christi triumphis apud Italiam</i>); the form <i>indemne</i> is more common, used by Sidonius Appollinaris (<i>Epistola XVI</i>) and Smaragdus (<i>Martyrologium</i>) amongst others.
mancipatorem	S 399, S 400	Rare word, though more common in legal usage; previously used in <i>Hisperica famina</i> (twice).
nanciscendam	S 379, S 403, S 405, S 417, S 418a, S 422, S 423	Common in classical Latin but rarer in the Middle Ages; used five times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>De metris</i>) and quite frequently by Bede.

pantocratonis	S 403, S 405	Transliteration from the Greek, παντοκράτωρ; used by Tertullian (<i>Adversus Valentinianos</i>) and in the Bonifatian correspondence (<i>Epistola XXX</i> , Wigbert to Lull). Whilst the concept of Christ <i>pantocrator</i> was common enough in Eastern Christianity, the use of the word in the Latin west was still comparatively rare in the tenth century.
pauefactis	S 403, S 405, S 1604, S 418, S 419	Unusual in medieval Latin, but very rare in classical Latin; used by Ovid (<i>Metamorphoses</i>).
reboante	S 422	Unusual poetic word used by Virgil (<i>Georgics</i>) and Lucretius (<i>passim</i>); also used by Charlemagne (<i>Epistola XIX</i> to Pope Leo III), Theodulf of Orleans (<i>De spiritu sancto</i>) and Flodoard of Rheims.
triquadri	S 399, S 400	Relatively rare word, but one with a strong Insular pedigree; used seven times by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i> ; 3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>); used by Orosius (<i>Historia aduersum paganos</i>), Isidore (<i>Etymologiae</i>), the Bonifatian correspondence (<i>Epistola CXI</i> , anonymous), <i>Hisperica Famina</i> , Alcuin (<i>Carmen CLXII</i>), Rabanus Maurus (<i>passim</i>); after 'Æthelstan A', used by Frithegod (<i>Breuiiloquium</i>).

Table 16 Category III (very rare words and portmanteaus)

Word	Used in	Comments
favillantium	S 407, S 426	Very rare word used previously only by Felix (<i>Vita S Guthlaci</i>).
gubernamine	S 399, S 400	Very rare word derived from <i>guber-</i> root; used by Augustine (<i>De scripturis</i>) and Smaragdus (<i>Collectiones</i>).

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inestimabiliter	S 403	Very rare word in this form; not used in any extant texts known to have circulated in Anglo-Saxon England, although <i>inestimabilis</i> was quite common.
odoramina	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Very rare post-classical word used by Macrobius (<i>Saturnalia</i>) and, later in the tenth century, by Liutprand of Cremona (<i>Chronicon</i>); the latter was not known in Anglo-Saxon England, but Liutprand was a practitioner of continental 'hermeneutic' Latin.
somatibus	S 403, S 405, S 407, S 412, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 425, S 1604	Quite common in later usage, but very rare in the tenth century; used before 'Æthelstan A' by Symphosius (<i>De ordine antiphonarii</i>), John Scottus Eriugena (<i>Carmen VIII</i>); used subsequently by Frithegod in the <i>Breiuiloquium</i> and Lantfred in the <i>Miracula S Swithuni</i> .
tanaliter	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	A very rare word used in the 'Saint-Omer Hymn' (also known as <i>Adelphus adelpha</i>).

Table 17 Category IV (apparent neologisms, and unusual or unprecedented derivations from Greek and Hebrew)

Word	Used in	Comments
adtractabilis	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Previously unattested in this form, but enjoyed some later use.
apicellos	S 423	Previously unattested in this form, but used subsequently by Byhtferth of Ramsey (<i>Vita S Dunstani</i>).
breuiculam	S 399, S 400, S 407, S 412, S 416, S 417, S 425, S 426	Previously unattested in this form, but enjoyed some later use.

calatur	S 399, S 400	Derived from Greek, καλω; used in transliterated form by Terrentius Varro whose work had no known circulation in Anglo-Saxon England; relatively common in medieval literature in Greek form, it was used in its Latin form by Bede (<i>De tempore ratione</i>) and John Scottus Eriugena (<i>Diuisione naturae</i>).
clivipparum	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Word used only by ‘Æthelstan A’. Currently untranslated (though it is probably a kind of musical instrument).
dapsilitate	S 379, S 403, S 405, S 407, S 412, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 425, S 426 (S 79*, S 307*, S 337*)	Greek borrowing from δαψιλής. Very rare in classical Latin: only attested in Suetonius and Columella, neither of whom circulated in Anglo-Saxon England. More common in the Middle Ages; used by Paulinus of Nola (<i>Epistola XXIII</i>), John the Deacon (<i>Magna uita S Gregorii</i>), Bede (<i>De celebritate quatuor temporum</i>).
donifluo	S 399, S 400	Previously unattested in this form.
gibonifero	S 399	Probably derived from Hebrew. Used in the <i>Rubisca</i> .
gramulis	S 407	Diminutive form of <i>grammus</i> , a rare late Latin word ultimately derived from Greek.
melancoliae	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Derived originally from Greek μελαγχολία, rare in classical Latin and not common in medieval Latin either; used twice by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
omnipatrantis	S 379, S 403, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 418, S 423, S 425, S 458	Previously unattested in this form.

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poliandria	S 407	Plural form of polyandrion, derived originally from Greek, πολυανδριον; extremely rare in Latin; used by Lactantius Firmianus and Arnobius the Elder, neither of whom circulated in England; also used by Rabanus Maurus (<i>Commentaria in Ezechielem</i>) and Theofrid (prose and verse <i>Vitae S Willibrord</i>).
salpice	S 416, S 417, S 423	Transliterated from Greek σαλπικτης, used eleven times by Aldhelm but unattested before that; used by Ermoldus Nigellus (<i>Carmen in honorem Ludovici</i>).
totillant	S 379, S 412, S 413, S 416, S 417, S 418, S 418a, S 419, S 422, S 423	Unattested.
yduma	S 403	Very rare word derived from Hebrew, <i>yadhayim</i> ; used in <i>Altus prosator</i> .
ymnidicae	S 407, S 425, S 426, S 458	Rare word; used by Theofrid (prose and verse <i>Vitae S Willibrord</i>).

Turbulent Priests: Dunstan, Cenwald and Oda

The two decades between the death of Æthelstan in October 939 and the accession of Edgar to a reunited kingdom in the summer of 959 are amongst the most fascinating of the whole Anglo-Saxon age. There are differing interpretations of the reigns of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig. On the one hand, their time in power was wracked by political instability, factionalism at the court, and moral impropriety: Edmund, having lost York to the Vikings, was murdered at Pucklechurch in Gloucestershire in 946 by a disenchanted exile; his sickly brother, Eadred, who succeeded him, relied on a kitchen cabinet to run the country on his behalf and seems never to have exercised much direct authority; and Eadwig, Eadred's nephew, was unreliable, impious and unpopular. Having slipped away from his coronation feast to enjoy a *ménage à trois* with his future wife, Ælfgifu and (somewhat improbably) her mother, Eadwig was interrupted *in flagrante* by an enraged Dunstan, then abbot of Glastonbury, who marched the no-doubt-disgruntled king back to the feast, demanding that he fulfil his royal duties in a more propitious manner.¹ It was an ominous start to a reign which ended with the temporary division of the kingdom following a virtual *coup d'état* by the Northumbrian and Mercian nobility in favour of Eadwig's brother, Edgar.

On the other hand, Edmund actually enjoyed significant military success against unfavourable odds in the north and, by the time of his death, had retaken a respectable portion of the territory he had lost, receiving the submission of several Scandinavian warlords in the process. He maintained England's high profile abroad, restored the house at Glastonbury and issued a law code.² Likewise, Eadred brought much of Northumbria back under royal control, receiving the outright submission of its independently minded nobility in 954, and oversaw the refoundation of the house at Abingdon which would

¹ This episode has been discussed by Domink Wassenhoven, 'The Role of Bishops in Anglo-Saxon Succession Struggles, 955-978', in *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church from Bede to Stigand*, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 12, ed. Alexander Rumble (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 97-108, at pp. 98-102.

² On the intellectual achievements of Edmund's reign in particular, see Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, pp. 173-84.

go on to become a major Anglo-Saxon cultural hub. Eadwig was an unusually generous king who appears to have managed the emerging factional rivalries amongst the English nobility with remarkable dexterity and political acumen, arguably preserving peace, if not unity, in the kingdom and avoiding the devastating infighting that would tear England apart during the reign of Æthelred 'the Unready'.

As so often for the medieval historian, it is the sources that are the problem. By far the most numerous, detailed, colourful and lengthy sources for the reigns of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig were written subsequently by the adherents of the English monastic reform movement which reached its zenith during the reign of Eadwig's successor, Edgar.³ The founders of this movement – Oda (bishop of Ramsbury, then archbishop of Canterbury), Dunstan (abbot of Glastonbury, then archbishop of Canterbury after Oda's death) and Cenwald (bishop of Worcester) – all emerged as leading figures within the Anglo-Saxon political and religious establishments in the 940s and 950s. During this time, Dunstan in particular did all he could to obtain as much personal power as possible, often in the face of concerted royal efforts to thwart his ambitions. One gets the impression, even from Dunstan's own biographer, that he was a dangerous, divisive, yet intensely charismatic individual, of whom the king was often keen to be rid. Edmund had banished Dunstan from the court in a fit of pique, only to recall the abbot, presumably in a more chastened mood following a nasty incident in which his horse had nearly decanted him into Cheddar Gorge. According to his biographers, Dunstan, having become even more powerful during Eadred's reign, found himself virtually running the country by the mid-950s.⁴ Eadred's successor, his nephew Eadwig, resented Dunstan's influence and, in an attempt to reassert royal authority, exiled him for a second time, this time to Flanders. As a result, Dunstan's earliest biographer, known only as 'B', conducted a comprehensive hatchet-job on Eadwig's reputation, portraying him as an incompetent, lecherous, vengeful, impious tyrant.⁵ Further scorn was poured upon the memory of the unfortunate king by a succession of subsequent writers who followed 'B' in lionising the saintly Dunstan and roundly condemning every aspect

³ For a longer discussion of the problem, see Shashi Jayakumar, 'Eadwig and Edgar: Politics, Propaganda and Faction', in *Edgar, King of the English, 959–975: New Interpretations*, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 8, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 83–103.

⁴ Although Dunstan was probably never as powerful as his biographers would have us believe, he certainly became an influential figure at Eadred's court. See Nicholas Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', in *St Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks and Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 1–23, at p. 13.

⁵ On 'B' and Dunstan's *Vita*, see Michael Lapidge, 'B. and the *Vita S. Dunstani*', in *ALL*, pp. 279–92.

of Eadwig's reign. Disaster was only averted, according to 'B', by the accession of the virtuous Edgar who, having been tutored (some might say indoctrinated) by Dunstan's colleague, Æthelwold, invited Dunstan back to England and initiated a period of political stability and religious reform throughout the kingdom. Of course, this image of Eadwig's destructive misrule being corrected by Edgar's pious, constructive reign is little more than a literary set piece designed to extol the memory of a king of whom the reformers approved at the expense of one they detested, and it demonstrates very well the problems inherent in seeking to understand the politics of the 940s and 950s. What seems clear is that, at this time, the kingdom's leading ecclesiastics, emboldened by the ideology of the monastic reform movement, were keen to enhance their personal and political influence at the expense of the king's authority.

In most cases, we might turn to the charter record for a more realistic picture of events. Under normal circumstances, charters, as products of the royal court which enacted directly the king's personal will, might go some way towards redressing the balance, providing an insight into the personalities and political ideologies of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig, and moving the narrative beyond the vitriolic accounts of the reformers and their historians. However, the charters of the 940s and 950s are not as helpful in this respect as they might be, for there is good evidence that responsibility for the production of charters was assumed by Cenwald and Dunstan themselves. Overall, in the two decades between 939 and 959, three different diplomatic traditions are visible: the 'mainstream' charters, which account for the majority of the documents issued by Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig, represented the standard, house style; the alliterative charters, which were issued in much smaller numbers, seem to be the work of Cenwald of Worcester;⁶ and the 'Dunstan B' charters, which were issued only during the reign of Eadred (before being revived in Edgar's reign), clearly had something to do with Dunstan and Glastonbury.⁷

It is imperative, however, to note that the involvement of these ecclesiastics in the production of royal charters in no way represented the devolution of responsibility away from the centre. Quite the opposite, in fact: both Cenwald and Dunstan were able to take over writing the kings' charters precisely because of the influential positions they held at court, not because of their distance from it. In discussing the relationship between England's leading ecclesiastics and charters, however, the alliterative and the 'Dunstan B' charters are not necessarily the most telling evidence. Top ecclesiastics had, after

⁶ See below, pp. 131–43.

⁷ See below, pp. 143–46.

all, always been responsible for writing charters, or for overseeing their production; it is no surprise to find that they continued to do so. Much more significant, arguably, was the way in which top churchmen cottoned on to the potential of the charter as a public relations tool. Just as Æthelstan had used charters as royal propaganda in the 920s and 930s, various ecclesiastics, led by the colourful Archbishop Oda, began to adopt lengthy, imperious personal styles in charter witness lists, often overshadowing the attestations of the king himself in the 940s and 950s. Increasingly, the role of the charter as a tool for projecting royal authority around the kingdom was hijacked by a powerful, pro-reform bloc within the court and used to promote its own agenda. Thus, the diplomatic record not only charts the earliest stages of the monastic reform movement that would tear through the Anglo-Saxon Church in the 960s, but, beyond that, it gives us a remarkable insight into the power struggle at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon state, showing us how Alfred's successors struggled to tame the resurgent ecclesiastical establishment whose spectacular recovery Alfred himself had set in train half a century before.

From Æthelstan to Edmund: continuity and change

First of all, though, something might be said about the relationship between the imposing productions of Æthelstan's chancery and the rather more mundane diplomas of his successor, Edmund. Whereas Æthelstan's charters were often spectacular works of literature designed to baffle and intimidate their audience with their grand rhetorical flourishes, Edmund's charters, to put it simply, were not. S 459 is one of the earliest charters issued during his reign. Drafted in 940, perhaps less than a year after Æthelstan's death, it recorded a grant of land in Wiltshire to an individual named Eadwulf and was preserved in the archive of Shaftesbury Abbey. From even the most cursory glance at the proem and dispositive section, the differences in style and language between this document and the charters of Æthelstan's reign are immediately apparent:

Regnante Deo imperpetuum architectorio qui sua ineffabili rite potencia omnia disponit atque gubernat uicesque temporum hominumque mirabiliter discernens terminumque incertum prout uult equanimiter imponens. Quapropter ego Admundus nutu Dei gracia basileos Anglorum cuidam meo homine Adulfo .x. mansas perhenniter impenderem ubi ruricoli antico usu nomen imposuerunt at Lidentune, ut ille bene perfruatur ac possideat quamdiu uiuat et post obitum sui heredes et posterii illius, quamdiu unus ex illa geneologia superfuerit, habeat et possideat cui libenter tradita fuerit ab illo. Sit autem predicta terra cum omnibus ad se rite pertinentibus libera, campis, pascuis,

pratis, excepto istis tribus, expedicione, pontis arcisue construccione. Si quis uero quod non optamus contra nostrum hoc decretum machinari uel infringere aliquid uoluerit, sciat se rationem grauiter redditurum in die iudicii ante tribunal Domini nisi prius hic digna emendauerit penitencia ante mortem.

With God the Creator ruling in eternity who with indescribable power governs and dispenses all things accordingly, wonderfully overseeing the changes of time and men, imposing the uncertain end equally as he wishes. Thus, I, Edmund, Emperor, by the tolerant grace of God, of the English would grant in eternity ten hides to my man Eadwuf, where the locals have traditionally imposed the name Liddington, that he might enjoy it well and possess it as long as he lives and that after his death he might leave it to his heirs and they to theirs, so long as there is one to succeed him from his family, that he might hold and possess it freely and should hand it on from him to another. However, the aforementioned land with all the fields, streams and meadows which rightly pertain to it, is free apart from these tributes, campaigning and fortress- and bridge-construction. If, however, which we do not wish, somebody should wish to infringe or go against this decree, let him know that he will have to render account gravely on Judgement Day before the court of the Lord, unless he has first made amends with penitence before his death.

With the exception of *basileos* (which maintains a transliterated Greek ending, *-os*) and the unusual though not unprecedented word, *architectorio*, this document contains no rare or complex vocabulary. Even *basileos* was, by this time, a common word in this context and it is more likely that it was employed in order to provide a sense of continuity between Edmund's royal image and Æthelstan's rather than to cater to any predilection for unusual vocabulary. The syntax is straightforward and largely devoid of ostentatious stylistic devices. There are no descriptive or particularly poetic adjectives or adverbs here; what descriptive words there are (*grauiter*, *mirabiliter*), are formulaic and fairly unremarkable. There are no lengthy similes, carefully crafted metaphors or intricate syntactical constructions to draw the reader's attention. The witness list is also extremely short (although it may be abbreviated). This is a comparatively simple, functional document, and is typical of many of Edmund's charters.

However, whilst the grandiose, literary language of Æthelstan's charters seems largely to have been discontinued in Edmund's reign, a significant level of continuity from Æthelstan's reign to Edmund's is, in fact, visible. Most importantly, there is clear evidence that the same person wrote charters for both Æthelstan and Edmund.⁸ The hand of

⁸ This is significant insofar as it would seem to demonstrate a relatively straightforward transition from Æthelstan's reign to Edmund's. A few years later, when Eadwig succeeded

a scribe known as 'Æthelstan C', described by Richard Drögereit, who first identified it, as a 'handsome, large flowing script of the school of writing of the 40s',⁹ wrote at least three extant diplomas, all of which survive in the archive of Christ Church, Canterbury. One was in Æthelstan's name (S 447, 939), and two were in Edmund's (S 464, 940; and S 512, 943). Whilst it is tempting to extrapolate from this all sorts of questions about the nature of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy,¹⁰ it seems more likely that the continued employment of 'Æthelstan C' was simply a matter of pragmatism. He was clearly doing a good job writing charters, so there was no particular reason for Edmund to replace him. Furthermore, several formulae typical of Æthelstan's charters were recycled in Edmund's. For instance, the following sanction appeared in S 447 (939, Christ Church, Canterbury; a product of 'Æthelstan C') and S 449 (939, Old Minster, Winchester), both from Æthelstan's reign; and in S 464 (940, Christ Church, Canterbury; also a product of 'Æthelstan C'), amongst many others, which was issued under Edmund's auspices.

Si quis autem quod non optamus hanc nostram difinitionem elationis habitu incedens infringere temptaverit perpeusus sit gelidis glaciaryum flatibus et pennino exercitu malignorum spirituum nisi prius inriguis pænitentiae gemitibus et pura emendatione emendaverit.¹¹

If, however, which we do not wish, somebody, proceeding with a tendency for arrogance should attempt to infringe this statement of ours, let him spend his time amongst freezing winds of ice and amongst a feathered army of malign demons, unless first he has mended his ways with the moist lamentations of penitence and with unpolluted improvement.

This sanction is indicative of reasonable, if not spectacular, stylistic ability; there is some alliteration (*incedens infringere; gelidis glaciaryum*;

Eadred, there is evidence of a comprehensive clear-out in the chancery. Not only did Eadwig seek to create a new, loyal, secular elite, but he also removed the responsibility for writing royal charters from the powerful ecclesiastics who had held it during his brother's reign, and placed it instead in the hands of less prominent men who he could, presumably, trust (and control?). See below, pp. 154–6.

⁹ Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', p. 348.

¹⁰ The nature of the Anglo-Saxon (and, for that matter, early medieval) 'state', and of the administrative mechanisms that served it, are the subjects of significant debate. The scholarship servicing that debate is predictably vast. The obvious introduction is Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500–1087*, ch. 5; which should be compared with Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word'. For a more comprehensive set of references, and a clear summary of the debate surrounding this, and other issues pertaining to the medieval 'state', see Susan Reynolds, 'The Historiography of the Medieval State', in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (Abingdon, 2002), pp. 117–38. The article contains a full bibliography, which has aged very well, pp. 133–8.

¹¹ BCS 741.

emendatione emendaverit), a little basic hyperbaton (*gelidis glaciærum flatibus*) and a few unusual words (*inriguis, gemitibus*). It is written in good Latin, certainly, and suggests a level of literary ambition. Indeed, there is much more consistency amongst the formulae of Edmund's charters, but very little evolution, and almost none of the 'tweaking' that was visible amongst the 'Æthelstan A' documents.¹² The overall impression is that, while a high standard of Latinity was certainly maintained in Edmund's charters, the emphasis that had been placed on innovation and variation during Æthelstan's reign had been left behind.

The extraordinary style of the 'Æthelstan A' diplomas was, of course, unsustainable. If writing one was a pain, deciphering it must have been nearly impossible. A downshift in terms of style and language was probably inevitable. Indeed, Æthelstan's own charters, once 'Æthelstan A' had stopped writing them, demonstrate exactly this kind of gearchange. Nonetheless, what is important about Edmund's charters is not how they differ from Æthelstan's so much as how they stay the same. To a great extent, Edmund's royal styles continue on from Æthelstan's, projecting much the same image of a powerful ruler and of an extremely highly literate court; the language of Edmund's charters remained sophisticated (if not spectacular), and various words and formulae which were introduced under Æthelstan remained in use; and, most significantly, at least one scribe, 'Æthelstan C', worked for both kings. Largely, then, the arrangements for charter production which had been put in place by Æthelstan appear to have remained unchanged into Edmund's reign. More importantly, the notion that a charter had to function both as a legal document and as a statement of royal propaganda remained.

The context and production of the alliterative and 'Dunstan B' charters

During the reigns of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig, three distinctive diplomatic traditions are visible. The most striking are the alliterative and 'Dunstan B' charters, which are associated with Bishop Cenwald of Worcester and Abbot Dunstan of Glastonbury respectively; but, alongside them, there remained a consistent diplomatic 'mainstream'.¹³ As Tables 18–20 and Figures 1–3 demonstrate, all three traditions largely coexisted alongside each other.

¹² Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 45.

¹³ On these series of documents, see Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 92–7.

Table 18 The charters of Edmund

Year	Mainstream	Alliterative	'Dunstan B'
940	S 459, S 460, S 461, S 462, S 463, S 464, S 465, S 466, S 467, S 468, S 469, S 470	S 472, S 473	
Total:	12	2	0
941	S 474, S 475, S 476, S 478		
Total:	4	0	0
942	S 480, S 481, S 482, S 483, S 485, S 486	S 479, S 484/ S 1606 ^a	
Total:	6	2	0
943	S 471, S 487, S 488, S 489, S 490, S 491, S 492, S 512		
Total:	8	0	0
944	S 493, S 494, S 495, S 496, S 497, S 498, S 500, S 501, S 502, S 503, S 504		
Total:	11	0	0
945	S 505, ^b S 506, S 507		
Total:	3	0	0
946	S 508, S 509, ^c S 510		
Total:	3	0	0
Uncertain S 513, S 514 date			

^a The relationship between S 484 and S 1606 is complex. See Andrew Wareham, 'The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *EME* 10 (2001): 375–99, at p. 394 n. 69.

^b This document contains features which are reminiscent of the 'Dunstan B' charters. See Miller, *New Minster*, no. 13.

^c This charter also seems to anticipate the 'Dunstan B' charters.

Table 19 The charters of Eadred

Year	Mainstream	Alliterative	'Dunstan B'
946	S 517a, S 517b, S 518, S 519	S 520	
Total:	4	1	0
947	S 522, S 522a, S 523, S 524, S 525, S 526, S, 527, S 528, S 529, S 530, S 542		
Total:	11	0	0
948	S 531, S 532, S 533, S 534, S 535, S 541, S 547		
Total:	7	0	0

Turbulent Priests: Dunstan, Cenwald and Oda

949	S 543, S 546, ^a S 551, S 552	S 544, S 548, S 549, S 550	
Total:	4	4	0
950		S 552a	
Total:	0	1	0
951	S 554, S 558	S 556, S 557	S 555
Total:	2	2	1
952	0	0	0
953			S 560, S 561, S 562
Total:	0	0	3
954	0	0	0
955		S 566, S 569	S 563, S 564, S 568
Total:	0	2	3
Uncertain date	S 559, S 578, S 580,	S 572	S 570
Total:	3	1	1

^a This charter has a strong connection to Dunstan.

Table 20 The charters of Eadwig

Year	Mainstream	Alliterative	'Dunstan B'
955	S 582		
Total:	1	0	0
956	S 581, S 584, S 585, S 587, S 588, S 589, S 590, S 591, S 592, S 593, S 594, S 595, S 596, S 597, S 598, S 599, S 600, S 601, S 602, S 603, S 604, S 606, S 607, S 608, S 609, S 610, S 611, S 612, S 613, S 614, S 615, S 617, S 618, S 619, S 620, S 621, S 622, S 623, S 624, S 625, S 626, S 627, S 628, S 629, S 631, S 632, S 634, S 635, S 636, S 637, S 638, S 663, S 666, S 1662	S 633	
Total:	54	1	0
957	S 639, S 640, S 641, S 642, S 643, S 644, S 645, S 646, S 647, S 649		
Total:	10	0	0
958	S 650, S 651, S 652, S 653, S 654, S 655, S 656, S 657		
Total:	8	0	0
959	S 586, S 659, S 660		
Total:	3	0	0
Uncertain date	S 662, S 662a, S 664		
Total:	3		

Figure 1 Edmund

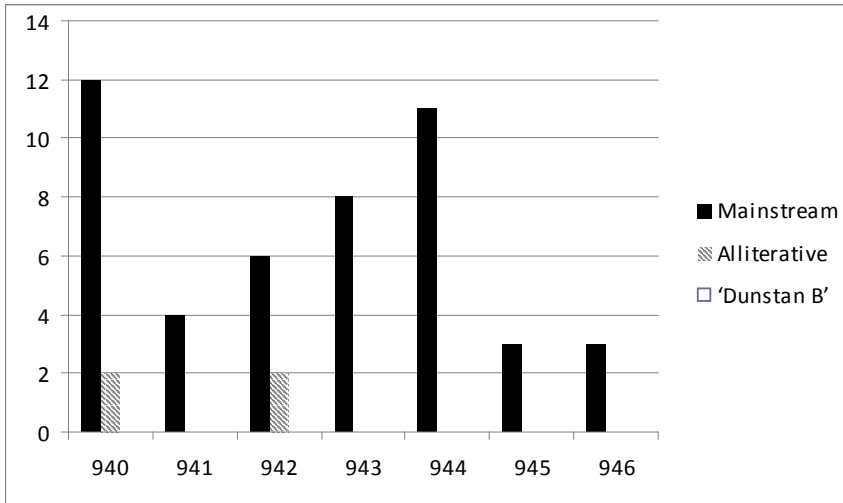


Figure 2 Eadred

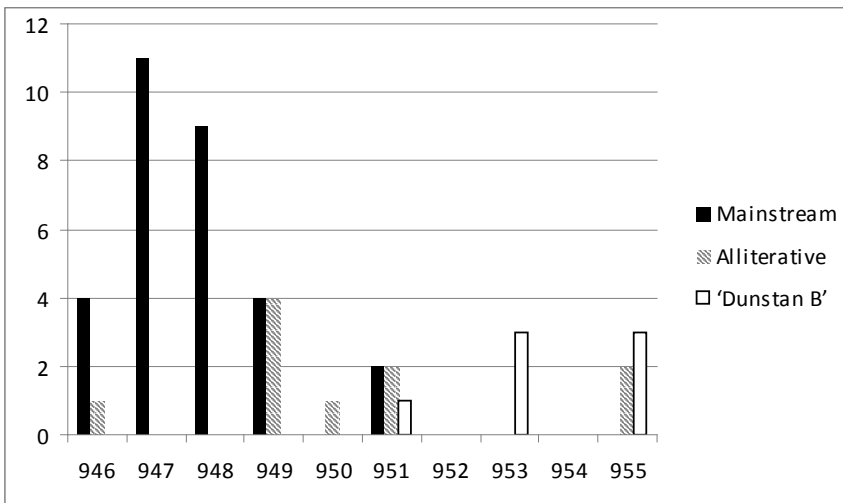
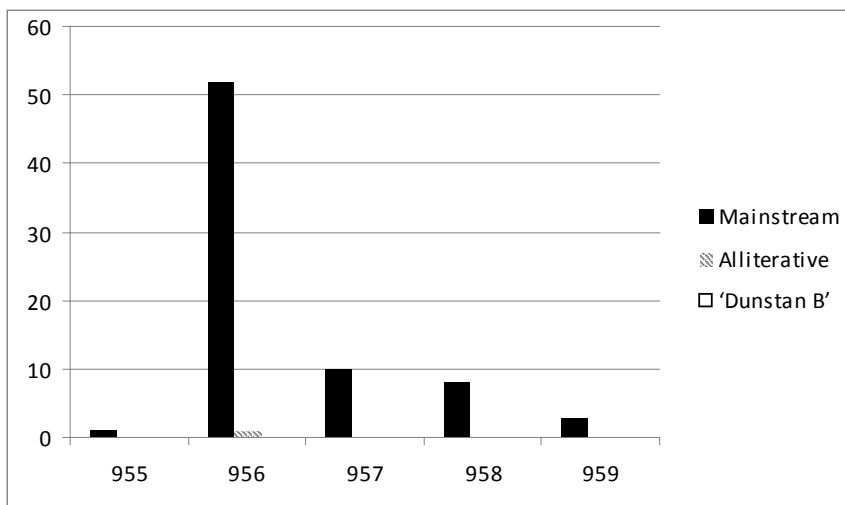


Figure 3 Eadwig



On the face of it, there are perfectly straightforward explanations for the patterns formed by both the alliterative and the 'Dunstan B' charters. The archival distribution of the alliterative charters and the locations of the estates they granted suggest that geographical criteria may have decided when Cenwald was given responsibility for drafting a charter. With the exceptions of Glastonbury and Abingdon,¹⁴ no alliterative charter was preserved in a traditionally 'West Saxon' archive lying south of the Thames, as shown in Table 21.

Likewise, with the exception of land in Wiltshire, the estates they granted lay north of the Thames, in the Midlands and north. Even the Wiltshire estates, at Grittleton and Langley, lay in the north of that county, only thirty-five kilometres south of Gloucester, in the historical borderlands between Wessex and Mercia. There is also some continuity amongst the recipients: the name Wulfric appears four times, Wulfsig the Black twice, and Uhtred twice (Table 22).¹⁵

¹⁴ The extent to which Abingdon should be considered 'West Saxon' is a moot point. Lying south of the Thames, it was just about in traditional West Saxon territory, and had a history stretching back to the eighth century. Having fallen into disrepair, however, it was refounded in 954 and, under the direction of its new abbot, Æthelwold, became synonymous with the tenth-century monastic reform movement. However, whilst it was geographically 'West Saxon', and whilst it seems to have been royal property when Eadred gave it to Æthelwold in 954, it was certainly not one of the traditional West Saxon houses (like Sherborne, Shaftesbury, Glastonbury, or Old Minster, Winchester), and was not connected to the West Saxon royal dynasty in the same way as, say, the New Minster, Winchester, Wilton or Athelney. See Kelly, *Abingdon*, pp. xxxv–xlvi.

¹⁵ It is tempting to suppose that Uhtred and Uhtred Cild were the same person, especially given the proximity of the estates granted in S 569 and S 548, which were little more than

Table 21 Archival distribution of alliterative charters

Archive	Charters
Abingdon	S 544
Barking	S 552a
Burton	S 479, S 484/S 1606, S 548, S 549, S 557, S 569
Ely	S 572
Evesham	S 550
Glastonbury	S 472, S 473
Peterborough	S 566
Thorney	S 556
Worcester	S 520, S 633

Table 22 Recipients of and location of estates granted by alliterative charters

Charter	Date, king	Archive	Recipient	Location of estate(s)
S 472	940, Edmund	Glastonbury	Wulfric, <i>minister</i>	Wiltshire
S 473	940, Edmund	Glastonbury	Wulfric	Wiltshire
S 479	942, Edmund	Burton	Wulfsige the Black	Staffordshire
S 484/ S 1606	942, Edmund	Burton	Wulfsige the Black	Staffordshire and Derbyshire
S 520	946, Edmund	Worcester	Wulfric	Northamptonshire
S 544	946, Edmund	Abingdon	Æthelmar, <i>praeses</i>	Buckinghamshire
S 548	949, Eadred	Burton	Uhtred, <i>dux</i> and <i>miles</i>	Derbyshire
S 549	949, Eadred	Burton	Ulfketel, <i>miles</i>	Possibly Shropshire
S 550	949, Eadred	Evesham	Wulfric, <i>miles</i>	Gloucestershire
S 552a	950, Eadred	Barking	Community of Barking	Essex
S 556	951, Eadred	Thorney	Ælfsige	Cambridgeshire
S 557	951, Eadred	Burton	Wulfhelm, <i>miles</i>	Staffordshire
S 566	955, Eadred	Peterborough	Ælfsige Hunlafing	Cambridgeshire
S 569	955, Eadred	Burton	Uhtred Cild, <i>pedisequus</i>	Derbyshire
S 572	954×955, Eadred	Ely	Wulfstan, <i>sequepedus</i>	Cambridgeshire
S 633	956, Eadwig	Worcester	Worcester minster	Worcestershire

Amongst the alliterative charters, then, there is a clear geographical bias. On many occasions, when the king wanted to give away estates which lay north of the Thames, he devolved responsibility

fifteen kilometers apart. However, the name Uhtred appeared several times in the mid-tenth century, and identification is unsteady at best: see PASE, *Uhtred* 6, *Uhtred* 7, *Uhtred* 8 and *Uhtred* 9. It has been suggested that the Wulfric who benefited from S 472, S 473 and S 550 was Dunstan's brother: see PASE, *Wulfric* 23; and Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations*. The identity of the Wulfric who received land in Northamptonshire in S 520 remains obscure: see PASE, *Wulfric* 25.

for drawing up the charter that recorded the gift upon the bishop of Worcester who, because of his obvious skill as a Latinist, the location of his bishopric, and perhaps also Worcester's impressive pedigree when it came to writing charters, was probably an obvious choice for the job.

Similarly, there is a straightforward explanation for the 'Dunstan B' charters. Eadred was unwell for much of his reign; it is well attested that, during these bouts of illness, he entrusted aspects of the day-to-day business of government (including, apparently, the drafting of his charters) to Dunstan, who was only too happy to oblige the king in his hour of need.¹⁶ Often, Eadred was not even able to attest the charters issued under his auspices, which adds to the impression that the kingdom was being run by others in his stead.¹⁷ It is unlikely that Dunstan himself was routinely the draftsman of these charters; this job was probably devolved onto a scribe from Glastonbury.¹⁸ However, it seems entirely possible that, in overseeing their production, Dunstan would have had some say in their formulae, language and style.¹⁹ Just as was the case with the alliterative charters, geography may also have been a relevant factor in the decision to give Dunstan the job of drafting a charter, as Table 23 demonstrates.

Table 23

Charter	Date	Archive	Recipient	Location of estate
S 560	953	Abingdon	Ælfric, <i>minister</i>	Berkshire
S 561	953	Abingdon	Ælfsige, <i>minister</i> , and his wife	Berkshire
S 562	953	Shaftesbury	Eadgifu, the king's mother	Sussex
S 563	955	Glastonbury	Ælfgyth, a nun at Wilton	Somerset
S 564	955	Abingdon	Ælfheah, <i>minister</i> and kinsman of the king	Berkshire
S 568	955	Glastonbury	Dunstan	Wiltshire
S 570	953×5	Shaftesbury	Brihtric, <i>minister</i>	Somerset

¹⁶ Simon Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', *ASE* 23 (1994): 165–93 at pp. 185–90.

¹⁷ Dunstan's prominence at the court at this time has been well documented; but the king's mother, Eadgifu, seems also to have played an important role in governing the kingdom. See Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 129–30.

¹⁸ Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', *passim*, and pp. 192–3.

¹⁹ Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', pp. 186–9. Also, see below, pp. 143–6.

All the 'Dunstan B' charters issued during Eadred's reign disposed of estates in the south and west. In 955, at the same time as S 563, S 564 and S 568 were issued, Eadred also gave away land in Cambridgeshire (S 566) and Derbyshire (S 569), both of which transactions were recorded by alliterative charters and preserved at Peterborough and Burton respectively. Importantly, neither Dunstan nor Cenwald operated a consistent monopoly over charter production; rather, it looks very much as if they were, from time to time, prevailed upon to record transactions disposing of lands which fell into their respective areas of responsibility.

Finally, it is important to restate at this point that the 'Dunstan B' and alliterative charters, in no way suggest that the actual production of charters was being localised. Instead, precisely the opposite was happening: leading ecclesiastics were becoming more integrated into the business of central government, from where they sought to exert their influence directly. The broad archival distribution of both the 'Dunstan B' and the alliterative charters seems to demonstrate that they were being composed centrally at court, before being shipped out to whatever archive was to take care of them. Of course, ecclesiastics had always had a role in producing the king's charters; that is exactly what Bishop Ælfwine had probably been doing for Æthelstan in the 920s and 930s, after all. What was new, however, was the rapid spread of the ideology of reformed Benedictinism amongst leading churchmen.²⁰ Before turning to examine how charters were hijacked for that purpose, however, it is worth examining briefly the language and style of the alliterative and 'Dunstan B' charters.

The style of the alliterative charters

Almost certainly drafted by somebody in the circle of Bishop Cenwald of Worcester, if not by the bishop himself,²¹ the alliterative charters appeared sporadically between 940 and 957. Sixteen surviving

²⁰ As with any political ideology, it is not easy to pin down precisely what the reformers believed in, and apparent hypocrisies, contradictions and inconsistencies are not hard to find. Probably, they had comparatively little in common beyond a shared desire to acquire wealth, power and influence for themselves and their institutions. The political-religious manifestos produced by the reformers in the 960s – *Regularis concordia*, 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries', and the New Minster Refoundation Charter – all give us some idea of what they professed to believe; but, at the same time, these documents are all closely associated with Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester, and so probably tell us more about his own views than they do about those of the reformers more generally: see below, pp. 165–6. An excellent overview of the scholarship on the matter, as well as an accessible sketch of what the Benedictine Reform was all about, is Catherine Cubitt, 'The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England', *EME* 6 (1997): 77–94.

²¹ Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', pp. 153–9. See also Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp. 431–53.

documents (some of which are heavily abbreviated) might reasonably be thought to be partly or entirely authentic: S 472, S 473, S 479, S 484/S 1606, S 520, S 544, S 548, S 549, S 550, S 552a, S 556, S 557, S 566, S 569, S 572 and S 633.²²

In their language and style, the alliterative charters record the work of an individual who was clearly very learned indeed. The first striking feature of their prose is that the authorial ‘tweaking’ that was apparent in the charters of ‘Æthelstan A’, where a repeated formula developed gradually with words being swapped for synonyms here and there, is also visible in the alliterative charters. Cyril Hart observed the phenomenon, observing that, like the ‘chancery charters (e.g. those of the ‘Æthelstan A’ series)’, the formulae used in the alliterative series ‘were changed from time to time’.²³ A simple comparison between the proems of two charters issued in 949 demonstrates this process (Table 24).

Table 24

S 544 (949, Abingdon)	S 548 (949, Burton)
Perpetue prosperitatis priuilegium quod constat cælesti paradiso sublimatum sancte trinitatis Dei monarchia gubernat magnopere que quoque deitatis essentia terrene hereditatis patrimonium cunctis prestat prout uult promerentibus.	Perpetue prosperitatis priuilegium quod constat celesti culmine collocatum sancte trinitatis dei tripudium rite promerentibus tribuit vsurpando que adhuc quoque deitatis essentia terrene hereditatis territoria cunctis prestat prout uult.

Both proems are identical until the word *caelesti*. Then, the words *paradiso sublimatum* in S 544 are replaced in S 548 by the alliterating couplet, *culmine collocatum*. The basic meaning is maintained, but the manner in which it is expressed changes. The two converge again with the words *sancte trinitatis dei*; but then, immediately, they differ again, as S 548 has *tripudium rite promerentibus tribuit vsurpando* for S 544’s *monarchia gubernat magnopere*, where the meanings and the words used to express them differ significantly. The two proems then

²² S 483 may also be counted amongst this number: a grant from Edmund to Theodred, bishop of London, gifting land in Norfolk, it was preserved at Bury St Edmunds. The proem exhibits a high level of alliteration and there are several formulae which are reminiscent of, though not identical to, those typical of the alliterative charters. However, the Bury archive is rather troublesome. Whilst the charter looks genuine enough, and certainly fits into the alliterative tradition in terms of its formulae and context (Cenwald attested it at number six in the witness list), it has been left out of the current discussion on the grounds that its authenticity has yet to be convincingly established. Interestingly, while it displays some features of the alliterative tradition, it also contains several formulae drawn from the contemporary diplomatic mainstream.

²³ Hart, *Danelaw*, p. 437.

run similarly to the end; however, S 544 adds *promerentibus* where S 548 does not; S 544 also has *patrimonium* instead of S 548's *territoria*. Clearly, these two proems are close enough to be essentially the same formula which has been tweaked and 'improved' the second time it was used, just as was the case with the 'Æthelstan A' documents. Other versions of the same formula with different wording occur in S 550 and S 479. Hart went on to identify the same tendency elsewhere: 'among the later charters', he wrote, 'the exhortation and anathema *Iam obsecrat imperando et imperat obsecrando* is shared by [S 552a, S 548, S 557, S 556, S 569 and S 633], in which there is a gradual development of the formula.'²⁴ There is good reason to believe, therefore, that a single author with a good deal of personal authority over his prose was likely responsible for drafting the alliterative charters.

Moreover, that author's Latinity was clearly very advanced. The most obvious feature of his prose is, unsurprisingly, alliteration. A brief comparison with the work of 'Æthelstan A' demonstrates just how enthusiastic the author of the alliterative charters really was about this technique. On average, an 'Æthelstan A' charter consists of about 280 words (excluding witness lists, boundary clauses and dating clauses), of which about fifteen alliterate (counting only those instances where the first letter of a set of broadly adjacent words is the same). This means that the level of alliteration runs at approximately 5.4 per cent, which is quite high, considering that 'Æthelstan A' was writing prose. Certainly, few authentic charters written prior to the 920s exhibited a level of alliteration as high as this. As a control, mainstream charters during issued during the 940s and 950s contained very little alliteration – fewer than 1 per cent of words, on average. Many contain no alliteration at all. It cannot be said, then, that alliteration was an automatic feature of diplomatic prose in the mid-tenth century. In the alliterative charters, the level of alliteration is, as one might expect, dramatically higher even than the grandiloquent prose of 'Æthelstan A'. The average alliterative charter contains twenty-five words which alliterate, but is much shorter than the standard 'Æthelstan A' production, running, on average, to only about 180 words (excluding the witness list, boundary clause and dating clause). This puts the level of alliteration at a massive 13.9 per cent – more than twice as high as in the 'Æthelstan A' documents.

Alliteration was not the extent of this draftsman's stylistic ambition, however. The technique of hyperbaton was also used from time to time in the alliterative charters: *omnia humane mentis machinamenta* (S 479), *essentia terrænæ hereditatis territoria* (S 550) and *nullus diabolica fraude deceptus* (S 548) are all good examples. More striking, though,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 437.

is the frequent use of unusual vocabulary, much of which was unprecedented in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. Just like 'Æthelstan A', the author of the alliterative charters clearly had a taste for the exotic, deploying a number of unusual Graecisms in his prose. He also seems to have enjoyed portmanteaus, and may have been personally responsible for the creation of several apparent neologisms (Table 25).

Table 25 Unprecedented vocabulary in the alliterative charters

Word	Used in	Comments
attomo	S 472	Common word.
carismatibus	S 473, S 479, S 484, S 548, S 556, S 663, S 520, S 549, S 550, S 557, S 569	Unusual but not especially rare word derived, originally, from Greek χαρισμα; used by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> , 3 <i>Epistola ad Acircium</i>); Vulgate (Corinthians).
celotenus	S 548	Rare portmanteau, used subsequently by Ælfric Bata.
choris	S 556, S 557	Common word, originally from Greek χορος.
chresticolis	S 549	Unusual, poetic word; used by Prudentius (<i>Cathemerina</i>) amongst others.
clauem	S 556, S 557, S 569	Common word.
collucrari	S 572, S 633	A very rare word. It had been used by Quintilian (<i>Institutio Oratoria</i>) and, subsequently, in the form <i>conlucrare</i> , in a capitulary of Charlemagne (<i>Capitulare de uillis uel curtis Imperialibus</i>).
conflagrauit	S 550, S 569	Common word.
conglomerat	S 472	Common word.
conlaudere	S 520, S 552a	Common word.
contigisse	S 520, S 572	Common word.
denihilent	S 544, S 552a	Neologism derived from the common verb <i>nihilo</i> .
diademata	S 473, S 520, S 549, S 572	Originally from the Greek διαδημα, this word was used by Pliny (<i>Historia Naturalis</i>) and became quite common in the Middle Ages; the noun <i>diadema</i> was used by Aldhelm (3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
elogium	S 520	Common word, used four times by Aldhelm (1 <i>Epistola ad Acircium</i> ; 3 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
ethraliter	S 569	Common word.
exarrare	S 572	Common word.

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faveto	S 473	Common word.
gratulabunda	S 472	Relatively common word, used eight times by Aldhelm (6 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola IX</i> ; 1 verse <i>De uirginitate</i>).
gymnasium	S 556, S 557	Common word.
ictu	S 472	Common word.
imprizante (= hymnizo)	S 473	Relatively common word.
laterculo	S 520, S 549	Common word.
locupleta	S 473, S 544, S 479, S 520, S 556, S 557	Common word; used three times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola ad Acircium</i>)
neuma	S 473	Rare word; originally from Greek πνεύμα.
nominetenus	S 484	Relatively common word.
peccusculum (= pectusculum)	S 473	Relatively common word.
propalare	S 548, S 572	Common word.
prophetica	S 472, S 556, S 557	Common word.
puerpera	S 473	Poetic word used by Ovid (<i>Metamorphoses</i>); used eight times by Aldhelm (2 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i> ; 3 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola V</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola ad Acircium</i>).
puerpurio	S 473	Rare word used by Pliny (<i>Historia naturalis</i>); used eight times by Aldhelm (1 <i>Carmen ecclesiastica</i> ; 2 verse <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola ad Acircium</i>).
quadripertiti	S 520	Common word, used by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
rumigerulo	S 473	Rare, late Latin word; used four times by Aldhelm (2 prose <i>De uirginitate</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola III</i> ; 1 <i>Epistola V</i>), Willibald (<i>Vita S Bonifatii</i>), Bonifatian correspondence (<i>Epistola XII</i> , Cuthbert to Lull), Charlemagne (<i>Epistola XII</i> to Offa).
scabellum	S 569	Common word.
subnotatas	S 484	Common word.
theorice	S 572, S 633	Rare Graecism, derived from θεωρικη; used by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
transformando	S 472	Common word.
tripudaliter	S 569	Neologism, previously unattested.
usurpatio	S 548, S 556, S 557, S 572	Common word.
uterinus	S 520	Common word.

S numbers in bold indicate that a word was used in more than one charter as part of the same formula.

Against the background of the comparatively straightforward charter prose of the 940s and 950s, the alliterative charters stand out as impressive literary works. Whilst they were neither as prolonged nor as ambitious as the work of 'Æthelstan A' (little was), they certainly record the output of a highly literate author who was not afraid of showing off. The influence of Aldhelm is, as always, apparent throughout: several words with strong Aldhelmian pedigrees (*rumigerulo*, *puerpurio* and *carismatibus* are good examples) suggest that his work may not have been far from the mind of the author of the alliterative charters. At the same time, however, he was not as desperate to acknowledge his debt to the erstwhile abbot of Malmesbury as some of his predecessors had been. The only possible paraphrase of Aldhelm's work in the alliterative charters is the phrase *uirgo puerpera celesti puerperio celeste protulit*, which was used in S 473; it resembles (though it is by no means a direct quotation of) a phrase used by Aldhelm in a number of his works, including the *Carmen ecclesiastica*, the verse *De uirginitate* and the prose *De uirginitate*.²⁵

The style of the 'Dunstan B' charters

The 'Dunstan B' charters could hardly be more different. Characterised by Simon Keynes as 'distinctive', standing 'apart from the mainstream of diplomatic practices in the tenth century' and having 'a particular association as a group with Glastonbury abbey',²⁶ they are short, precise, unembellished and written in a remarkably unpretentious prose style. Although probably not actually drafted by Dunstan personally, their initial association with Glastonbury, where Dunstan was the abbot, has been justification enough to attach his name to them, and it seems likely that he would have had a say in the style, language and formulae they used.²⁷ Altogether, twenty-one 'Dunstan B' charters are extant (plus three forgeries in Eadwig's name). Most (thirteen) were issued during Edgar's reign and attest to the considerable royal favour enjoyed by Dunstan in the 960s and 970s.²⁸ However, it is the eight issued during Eadred's reign that are of relevance here: S 555, S 560, S 561, S 562, S 570, S 563, S 564, S 568.

The 'Dunstan B' charters are immediately recognisable from their distinctive form and style. Short and to the point, they dispense with

²⁵ Love, 'The Sources of S 180', *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed August 2014.

²⁶ Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', p. 165. Also, see above, pp. 137–8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 192–3.

²⁸ The full set of 'Dunstan B' charters have been collated by Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', pp. 172–9.

the usual invocation and proem, beginning instead with the dating clause; they use variations of a consistent set of related formulae to introduce the boundary clauses and the witness lists; and the formula *consensi et subscripsi* is used without exception for the act of attestation. It is the 'occurrence of' these features 'consistently in combination with each other', wrote Keynes, 'which constitutes the defining character of the 'Dunstan B' charters as a group'.²⁹ Their vocabulary includes a handful of unprecedented words, but nowhere near as many as the alliterative or the 'Æthelstan A' charters (Table 26).

Table 26 Unprecedented vocabulary in the 'Dunstan B' charters

Word	Used in	Comments
adstrictio	S 560	Common word, used four times by Aldhelm (4 prose <i>De uirginitate</i>).
alubescence	S 555	An unusual, poetic word.
aurigenum	S 563	Rare, poetic word, used by, amongst others, Ovid (<i>Metamorphoses</i>) and Sidonius Apollinaris (<i>Carmina</i>).
carnaliter	S 560	Relatively common word.
confaute	S 562	Relatively common word
obsequium	S 560, S 561, S 570	An unusual word, used roughly contemporaneously by Liutprand of Cremona.
prerogante (= peregrante)	S 562	Relatively common word.
subtronzato	S 562	An unusual Graecism. It had been used previously in S 546 which, though not considered one of the canonical 'Dunstan B' charters, nevertheless has a strong connection with Glastonbury and Dunstan. ^a It would become commonplace in Anglo-Saxon charters later in the tenth century, and was used by Byrhtferth of Ramsey (<i>Vita S. Oswaldi</i>).

S numbers in bold indicate that a word was used in more than one charter as part of the same formula.

^a See Lapidus, 'The Hermeneutic Style'; and Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', pp. 184–5.

A few unusual, poetic words or Graecisms scattered here and there serve to remind the reader that the formulator of the 'Dunstan B' tradition was no ignoramus, but the prose is otherwise plain and rather factual. It is also notable that the work of Aldhelm is hardly in

²⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

evidence at all here. If anything, the author of the 'Dunstan B' charters may have been trying to escape from Aldhelm's looming presence: those poetic words that he did use (for instance: *aurigenum*, *subtroni-zato*) had not been used by Aldhelm. The only unprecedented word in the 'Dunstan B' charters issued during Eadred's reign that had also been used by Aldhelm was *adstricto*, which is sufficiently common that it cannot, by itself, stand as firm evidence of a deliberate link to his work. As with the vocabulary of the 'Dunstan B' charters, the general Latin style in which they were composed is competent, certainly, but not exaggerated. The sanction of S 560 (953, Abingdon), which is an example of a formula that was used several times throughout the 'Dunstan B' corpus, is typical:

Quod si quisque quod non obtamus huiusce donationis cartulam
infringere temptauerit, nisi prius in hoc seculo digne castigetur, in
futuro perenni cruciatu prematur.

If somebody, which we do not wish, should attempt to violate the record
of this donation, unless he has first been chastised accordingly in this
life, may he be hard pressed by eternal torture in the future.

Those adjectives and nouns which depend on each other (such as *perhenni cruciatu*) tend to be placed together. There is no hyperbaton or hyperbole, and little obvious alliteration (*quod si quisque quod* and *perenni cruciate prematur* are the only examples here). The overall impression made by the 'Dunstan B' charters is that they are straightforward legal documents which, whilst clearly written by a competent and erudite Latinist who had access to a good glossary, do not masquerade as great works of literature.

Given their connection to Dunstan, their avoidance of the 'hermeneutic' style and of the work of Aldhelm is conspicuous and significant. Dunstan was a highly competent Latinist whose capacity to write challenging sophisticated text was impressive.³⁰ If he had wanted the 'Dunstan B' charters to stand as imposing works of 'hermeneutic' literature in the tradition of 'Æthelstan A', he certainly had the expertise to do that. Clearly, therefore, he did not want anything of the sort. This reliance on a rather ordinary, even monotonous style may have had something to do with the religious politics of the time. A striking feature of the charters of Edmund and Eadred is the prominence of leading ecclesiastical figures of the monastic reform party, who seem to have used charters as vehicles for their own propaganda. In Æthelstan's reign, charters had been used to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of the king's court;

³⁰ On Dunstan's literary style see Gretsche, *Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, pp. 372–6; and Michael Lapidge, 'St Dunstan's Latin Poetry', in *ALL*, pp. 151–6.

it may well be that Dunstan was trying to do exactly the opposite. By producing short, rather terse charters in comparatively mundane language, whilst reserving the best of his grand, 'hermeneutic' style for 'literary' works more directly associated with the reform, perhaps he was trying to reclaim something of the intellectual hegemony that had been established by Æthelstan, and to announce that it was no longer the king's court, but the Church that was at the scholarly cutting edge of Anglo-Saxon intellectualism.³¹

Oda, the mainstream charters, and the struggle for power

It has long been acknowledged, as Rebecca Stephenson has demonstrated,³² that, in the tenth century, pro-reform ecclesiastics developed a shared enthusiasm for 'hermeneutic' Latin, which they used as a way of broadcasting their shared sense of identity and monastic exceptionalism. The Latin they wrote certainly had its roots in the Aldhelmian style of 'Æthelstan A', and of the Mercian charter draftsmen of the ninth century; but, by the late 950s and 960s, it had evolved beyond this, incorporating elements of comparable continental styles, presumably with the aim of tying the works of the English reformers to their contemporaries at Fleury, Cluny, St Peter's and the other continental centres of reform.³³ However, the way in which this tendency, championed by Oda, bishop of Ramsbury (c. 927–41) and archbishop of Canterbury (941–58), manifested itself in the charters of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig suggests something more than the early blossoming of reformist ideology. It seems to demonstrate that, for the first time, ecclesiastics were beginning to use charters as a means of projecting themselves and their ideas around the kingdom in a way which had, in the past, been strictly reserved for the king.

Oda, by all accounts, was one of Anglo-Saxon England's more colourful characters. It is a remarkable testament to the tolerant, progressive and multicultural atmosphere of Anglo-Saxon England

³¹ It is typical of the many contradictions visible in the activities of the reformers, and of Dunstan's rather puritanical streak, that Cenwald was clearly not interested in doing anything of the sort in the alliterative charters.

³² See Rebecca Stephenson, 'Scapegoating the Secular Clergy: The Hermeneutic Style as a Form of Monastic Self-Definition', *ASE* 38 (2009): 101–35.

³³ On which see Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style'; and 'A Frankish Scholar in Tenth-Century England: Frithegod of Canterbury/Fredegaud of Brioude', in *ALL*, pp. 157–82. For an overview of the life and influence of Abbo of Fleury, who was one of the most prominent links between the Anglo-Saxon and continental movements, and whose impact upon Anglo-Saxon intellectual history during his stay in England in the 980s was considerable, see Marco Mostert, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury: A Study of the Ideas about Society and Law of the Tenth-Century Monastic Reform Movement*, *Middelleeuwse studies en bronnen* 2 (Hilversum, 1987).

that Oda, a second-generation Viking, could, less than a century after his antecedents had come to England in order (presumably) to slaughter monks and steal things from their monasteries, be promoted to England's most senior ecclesiastical office.³⁴ It is in keeping, then, that for Eadmer of Canterbury, who wrote a *Vita* of Oda sometime before 1116,³⁵ the future archbishop was not quite the unassuming country curate. In an episode which, for fast-paced action and sheer dramatic tension, beats any Hollywood blockbuster, we find Oda alongside King Æthelstan at the Battle of Brunanburh:

Flanked by a strong force of armed men and rushing towards the enemy, the chieftain [Æthelstan] engaged in battle, and for a very long time there was the most horrendous fighting on both sides. However the king had brought the blessed Oda into battle with him, trusting that he would defeat the enemy much more by the merits of this man than with hordes of soldiers. And while the most bitter and wretched slaughter was happening all about, a lamentable event occurred. For while King Æthelstan was fighting, his sword shattered close to the hilt and exposed him to his enemies, as if he were defenceless [...] The king was perplexed about what to do in such a situation, for he thought it unspeakable to take a weapon from one of his men to arm himself [...] Then all at once the air resounded with the clamour of the multitude crying out both for God to offer assistance and for venerable Oda to come forth as quickly as possible. He raced up to the king and, although weary, asked what he wanted him to do; he listened to the king and immediately responded with these words: 'What is the problem? What is worrying you? Your blade hangs intact at your side and yet you complain that it is broken. Come to your senses, draw the sword and, behold, the right hand of the Lord shall be with you' [...] At these words all those who were listening were struck with great amazement, and casting their glance towards the king they saw hanging by his side the sword which had not been there when they had looked earlier. Snatching it and taking comfort in the Lord, the king advanced and maimed or put to flight or dealt death to all the men rushing upon him from both his left and right.³⁶

Sadly, Oda's presence at Brunanburh is impossible to confirm, but it does seem curiously in keeping with the rest of his career that he

³⁴ For a good overview of Oda's life, see Michael Lapidge, 'Oda', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes and Donald Scragg (Oxford, 1999), pp. 339–40; and Brooks and Kelly, *Christ Church*, pp. 206–8.

³⁵ The date of the text is uncertain. See Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir, *Eadmer of Canterbury: Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan and Oswald*, OMT (Oxford, 2006), p. xxxv.

³⁶ Eadmer, *Vita S. Odonis*, ch. 7, ed. and trans. Turner and Muir, *Eadmer of Canterbury*, pp. 13–15. Interestingly, William of Malmesbury provided an account of the same miracle in his *Gesta pontificum*, but attributed it to the intercession of Aldhelm rather than Oda.

would have been in the thick of the action whenever possible.³⁷ More relevant (and rather better attested) than his swashbuckling exploits on the battlefield were Oda's considerable intellectual achievements. During his archiepiscopacy, he co-authored a law code for Edmund (1 Em),³⁸ produced a text of religious guidelines called the *Constitutiones*, and worked hard, more generally, to reinvigorate the English Church in line with an agenda of ecclesiastical (and, perhaps, monastic)³⁹ reform. Increasingly, in the 940s and 950s, he placed himself whenever possible at the very centre of royal government. Indeed, a particular passage from the *Constitutiones* leaves us in little doubt as to his views on the relationship between secular and religious authorities:

Secundo capitulo ammonemus regem et principes et omnes, qui in potestate sunt, ut cum magna humilitate suis archiepiscopis omnibus aliis episcopis obedient, quia illis claves regni celorum date sunt et habent potestatem ligandi atque solvendi.

In the second chapter we advise the king and chief men and all who have power that they are obedient with great modesty to their archbishops and to all of their bishops, since it is to them that the keys of the kingdom of heaven have been given, and they who have the power of binding and loosing.⁴⁰

Oda went on, in the *Constitutiones*, to discuss the importance of 'cooperation' between the kingdom's secular and religious authorities (a theme which was enthusiastically adopted by Æthelwold in the 960s).⁴¹ Yet, this passage leaves us with little doubt as to which of these authorities Oda felt ought to be the senior partner in that relationship.

³⁷ Bishops were no strangers to military action in the Middle Ages: perhaps the most famous example of a bishop going into battle is that of Oda's near-namesake, Bishop Odo of Bayeux, who fought alongside William at the Battle of Hastings, on whom see David Bates, 'The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (1049/50–1097)', *Speculum* 50 (1975): 1–20. Even he, however, pales in comparison to the bloodthirsty Bishop Absalon of Roskilde who, in the 1160s, personally commanded a series of pseudo-crusades against the Wends of the eastern Baltic. See Janus Møller Jensen, 'Denmark and the Holy War: A Redefinition of a Traditional Pattern of Conflict 1147–1169', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 4, ed. Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 219–36. See also Timothy Reuter, 'Episcopi cum sua militia: The Prelate as Warrior in the Early Staufer Era', in *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Karl Leyser*, ed. Timothy Reuter (London, 1992), pp. 79–94.

³⁸ Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1898–1916), vol. 1, pp. 184–6.

³⁹ According to William of Malmesbury, Oda had been tonsured at Fleury; Eadmer states, less credibly, that the abbot of Fleury travelled to Canterbury to ordain him: see Turner and Muir, *Eadmer of Canterbury*, p. lv.

⁴⁰ Oda, *Constitutiones*, ch. 2. Dorothy Whitelock, Martin Brett, and Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, ed., *Councils and Synods: With Other Documents Relating to the English Church, 1, AD 871–1204* (Oxford, 1981), p. 70.

⁴¹ On Oda's political philosophy and the *Constitutiones*, see Dorothy Whitelock's discussion

It is no surprise, therefore, to find him stamping his authority on the king's charters. Before his appointment to Canterbury in 941, Oda attested a number of Æthelstan's and Edmund's charters as *Oda episcopus*. Then, following Oda's elevation, Edmund gave a small estate in Wiltshire to his *vassallus*, Eadric (S 478, 941, Shaftesbury).⁴² The transaction was, in most respects, unremarkable. The charter that recorded it was anything but. Opening with a long, flamboyant proem which is full of unusual vocabulary (*ymaginem, superbire, progenie, erumpna*) and reaching a climax with an imposing and distinctly poetic sanction (*et in die futuro calamitatis collocetur a sinistris cum tartarorum demoniis, ubi erit fletus et stridor dencium, pena eterna sine prestulacione consolacionis*), the author of this charter was clearly trying very hard indeed to make a point. Against the background of the rather uneventful prose in which the majority of Edmund's mainstream charters were written, S 478 stands as a conspicuous beacon of advanced Latinity. There is much that is worthy of comment in this charter; perhaps most telling, though, are the attestations. Those of King Edmund and his brother, Eadred, and then of the *duces* and *ministri*, are comparatively straightforward:

Ego Admundus Anglicarum aliarumque nacionum rex hanc telluris
donacionem sub sigillo dominice crucis tradidi

+ Ego Adred eiusdem regis frater consignau

[...]

Ego Wulfgar dux + Ego Atelwold dux + Ego Athelstan dux + Ego Elhelm
dux + Ego Apelmund dux + Ego Uhterd dux + Ego Oda minister + Ego
Aluric minister + Ego Admund minister + Ego Wullaf minister + Ego
Withgar minister + Ego Alfred minister + Ego Wuluric minister + Ego
Wulgar minister + Ego Alfsige minister + Ego Ordeah minister + Ego
Aperic minister + Ego Alfsige minister + Ego Apered minister + Ego
Wulfhelm minister +

The attestations of the bishops, however, are at the opposite end of the scale altogether:

Ego Odo Dorobernensis ecclesie archiepiscopus regis tradicionem
trophæo crucis assignato benedixi. + Ego Peodred Londoniensis
episcopus consecraui. + Ego Alphech Wintoniensis episcopus adunaui. +
Ego Cenwold episcopus predestinaui. + Ego Eluric episcopus muniui. +
Ego Wlfhelm episcopus hoc sigillum impressi. + Ego Burgric episcopus
in hec adhesi. + Ego Alfgar episcopus hec certando me esse decreui

in *Councils and Synods*, p. 68; and Alaric Trousdale, 'Being Everywhere at Once: Delegation and Royal Authority in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Owen-Crocker and Schneider, pp. 277–83.

⁴² This Eadric may have had a number of estates: see PASE, 'Eadric 8'.

Each bishop asserted his individuality by attesting with a different word: *benedixi* for Oda, *consecraui* for Theodred, *adunaui* (a rare word with distinct patristic associations) for Ælfheah, *predestinaui* for Cenwald and so on. Often, the words used, such as *predestinaui*, are quite inappropriate in the context and are clearly being used more for show than for functionality (much as the descriptions of Æthelstan's kingship had been two decades before). Oda's attestation is particularly interesting.⁴³ Rather than simply giving his consent to the gift in a rather passive way, as his predecessors had done, he gives his blessing (*benedixi*) to the king's gift. It is as though he wants to be seen as exercising his religious authority over the king's will. Whilst the attestations of the king and his brother are rather quotidian, and those of his *duces* and *ministri* are simple and anonymous, the attestations of the bishops are stylistically original and intellectually interesting. Oda's style is as grand as the king's and uses markedly more sophisticated vocabulary; the styles of the rest of the bishops far outstrip those of the king's brother, Eadred, and the rest of the secular witnesses in their length and complexity.

Bishops had attested charters in unusual ways before: at the end of Æthelstan's reign, Ælfheah of Winchester had styled himself *Ego Ælfheah Wintoniensis ecclesie episcopus triumphalem tropheum agie crucis impressi* ('I, Bishop Ælfheah of Winchester, have inscribed the sensational symbol of the holy cross'). Alongside a quotation from the work of Aldhelm,⁴⁴ this style contains the word *agia*, a Graecism meaning 'holy'.⁴⁵ At about the same time, Archbishop Wulfhelm of Canterbury, not wanting to be upstaged by his junior, adopted a similarly ostentatious style. Neither, however, used these styles consistently in the 930s. In contrast, Oda used his own, grand style in almost every mainstream charter produced between 941, when he was appointed archbishop, and 955, when Eadwig succeeded to the throne.

Moreover, Oda was clearly using his charter attestations to make a point. From S 478 onwards, the styles used by Oda consistently equalled or, more usually, exceeded the king's in their length and

⁴³ Oda's attestation of S 478 has been the cause of some controversy; however, the balance of recent scholarship suggests that it is acceptable and, moreover, that Oda was appointed to Canterbury in 941 rather than 942: see Mary O'Donovan, 'An Interim Revision of Episcopal Dates for the Province of Canterbury, 850–950, I', *ASE* 1 (1972): 23–44, at pp. 32–3; Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, *Studies in the Early History of Britain* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 222–3; and Kelly, *Shaftesbury*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ Aldhelm used the words *triumphalis* and *tropheum* together in the prose *De uirginitate*. He used *tropheum* alongside other words with the root *triumph-* on several occasions. See Aldhelmi *opera*, p. 723.

⁴⁵ The word had an established history in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic.

sophistication. For example, the witness list of S 482 (942, Abingdon), reads:

+ Ego Eadmundus rex Anglorum prefatam donationem cum sigillo sancte crucis confirmaui. + Ego Oda Dorobornensis ecclesie archiepiscopus eiusdem donationem cum sigillo sancte crucis confirmaui. + Ego Æodred Lundoniensis ecclesie episcopus cum sigillo sancte crucis confirmaui. + Ego Ælfheah Uuintoniensis ecclesie episcopus triumphalem tropheum agie crucis impressi.

Here, although the language is not particularly ostentatious, Oda and the king attest with very much the same styles, except that Oda's style runs to twelve words whilst the king's only runs to eleven. The attestations of Theodred and Ælfheah, below, both consist of ten words, which seems unlikely to be accidental. The same trait is visible in S 485 (942, Shaftesbury), where the king's attestation takes eleven words, whilst Oda's requires thirteen. This time, Oda was outdone by Archbishop Wulfstan of York, who attested with fourteen words, unusually. In contrast, the attestations of Edmund's mother, Eadgifu, and his brother, Eadred, although they come above those of the bishops and archbishops, run to eight and six words respectively. Indeed, from Oda's appointment in 942 until Edmund's death in 946, every one of the archbishop's attestations of the king's mainstream charters is markedly longer and more flamboyant than the king's. Oda usually used either *Ego Odo Dorobernensis ecclesie archiepiscopus eiusdem regis donacionem cum tropheo agie crucis confirmaui* (thirteen words, including two Graecisms) or *Ego Oda Dorobernensis æcclesiæ archiepiscopus ejusdem regis donationem cum sigillo sancte crucis subaravi* (thirteen words). Edmund, however, usually attested with *Ego Eadmundus Rex Anglorum prefatam donationem cum sigillo sancte crucis confirmavi* (eleven words). Even when the king's formula was altered, as it was in S 489 (943, Christ Church, Canterbury), it still did not run to more than thirteen words, equalling that used by Oda.

Interestingly, in S 493 (944, Wilton), the king adopted a new formula of attestation, which ran to fourteen words: *Ego Eadredus rex Anglorum prefatam donationem sub sigillo sancte crucis indeclinabiliter consensi atque roborau.* Not to be outdone, Archbishop Oda, in the same charter, also found a new way of expressing himself which just happened to be fifteen words long: *Ego Oda Dorobornensis ecclesie archiepiscopus eiusdem regis principatum et beniuolentiam cum sigillo sancte crucis conclusi.* It is tempting to wonder whether the hyperbolic qualities of Oda's attestation (for instance, *principatum et beniuolentiam*) were specifically designed to ensure that the archbishop's style was longer than the king's. Following Edmund's untimely death in 946, Oda's attestations of Eadred's mainstream charters remained equally lengthy. Eadred usually used the formula *Ego Eadredus rex Anglorum*

prefatam donationem sub sigillo sancte crucis indeclinabiliter consensi atque roboravi (fourteen words); Oda, however, reacted by resorting to the fifteen-word-long attestation he had used in S 493: *Ego Odo Dorobernensis ecclesie archiepiscopus ejusdem regis principatum et benivolentiam cum sigillo sancte crucis conclusi*.

Although he was the most prominent, Oda was by no means the only ecclesiastic to take advantage of charter attestations in this way. At the end of Æthelstan's reign, in 938, Cenwald began to appear in witness lists as Kenwald or Koenwald. Mechthild Gretsch wondered if he might have adopted the K having been impressed by German orthography during his trip to the court of the Emperor Henry 'the Fowler', where he accompanied Æthelstan's sister, Eadgyth.⁴⁶ This is certainly possible; but given the relative abundance of Graecisms in the alliterative charters, it is also worth considering whether Cenwald may have been trying Hellenise his own name, adopting the Greek letter kappa instead of the usual, Anglo-Saxon C. In S 475, Cenwald may have augmented his kappa with an upsilon, appearing as *Kynewald*.⁴⁷ Perhaps more significant is that, from 949, Cenwald began to call himself *monachus* rather than *episcopus* (in S 544, 949, Abingdon; S 566, 955, Peterborough; S 569, 955, Burton; and S 633, 956, Worcester), a style which carried considerable weight in the atmosphere of monastic reform that prevailed during Oda's archiepiscopate.⁴⁸

Dunstan was less subtle. Although, as an abbot, he was often absent from the witness lists of the 'Dunstan B' charters,⁴⁹ when he did appear, he made sure his role in the process of drawing up the charter was unambiguous. He attested S 509 (946, Glastonbury) with the phrase (which has been corrupted in transmission) *Dunstan abbas nolens sed regalibus obediens verbis haunc cartulam scribere jussi* ('I, Abbot Dunstan, although unwilling, out of obedience to the royal words, have ordered this charter to be written'). In 949, the same year that Cenwald started calling himself *monachus*, Dunstan again claimed responsibility for drafting a charter, S 546 (Christ Church, Canterbury): *Ego Dunstan indignus abbas rege Eadredo imperante hanc domino meo hereditariam kartulam dictitando conposui et propriis digitorum*

⁴⁶ Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 34 (Cambridge, 2005), p. 93.

⁴⁷ This said, the name element *Kyne-* had appeared in plenty times in Anglo-Saxon charters over the years; the spelling *Kynewald* may reflect a misreading (or a mishearing) by the charter's twelfth-century copyist. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the scribal performance in the witness list is generally good, and that several other names (such as Ælfheah's), which might have been more easily corrupted, have been copied in the expected forms. This is the only time that Cenwald's name was spelled with a K and Y.

⁴⁸ See Simon Keynes, 'Koenwald', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, eds Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes and Donald Scragg (Oxford, 1999), pp. 273–5.

⁴⁹ It became less common, after Æthelstan's reign, for abbots to attest charters. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 47–9.

articulis perscripti ('I, Dunstan, an unworthy abbot, by the command of my lord, King Eadred, have composed this charter of inheritance and wrote it down with the joints of my own fingers'). Whatever the actual nature of Dunstan's position during Eadred's reign,⁵⁰ it is very clear that Dunstan himself, at least, wished to emphasise his importance at the court.⁵¹

Given the power and influence of Dunstan, Cenwald and Oda, it is hard to believe that these styles were not of their own design. It was an extraordinarily courageous draftsman who tinkered with the personal moniker of the archbishop of Canterbury, or who altered the spelling of the bishop of Worcester's name and started calling him *monachus* without his say-so. It is even more unlikely that it would happen so consistently unless it was being done deliberately. Moreover, the differences between the styles used by Oda and his predecessor, Wulfhelm, are informative. On those occasions, towards the end of Æthelstan's reign, when Wulfhelm's style was embellished, he usually used: *Ego Wulfhelm Dorobornensis ecclesiæ archiepiscopus ejusdem regis donationem cum trophæo agiæ crucis consignavi* (for instance: S 438, 937, Wilton; S 441, Old Minster, Winchester, 938; or S 442, 938, Glastonbury). In S 478 (941, Shaftesbury), the first extant charter to be attested by Oda as archbishop, he styled himself: *Ego Odo Dorobernensis ecclesie archiepiscopus regis tradicionem trophæo crucis assignato benedixi*. There are similarities with Wulfhelm's style, but subtle tweaks (changing Wulfhelm's *donationem* for *tradicionem*, for instance) suggest that, while Oda was happy to inherit his predecessor's style, he was also keen to put his own stamp on his office. The flexibility with which Oda's style subsequently evolved, usually trying to keep one step ahead of the king's, seems also to indicate a degree of personal involvement. To some extent, these styles were probably associated with a particular see and passed on from one incumbent to the next; but at the same time, in the 940s and 950s, they seem also to have reflected the tastes and proclivities of the individuals they described.

This is significant because it demonstrates that, towards the end of Æthelstan's reign, and throughout the reigns of Edmund and Eadred, certain leading ecclesiastics were able to personalise their attestations, suggesting that they had an interest in presenting themselves to the

⁵⁰ On which see Nicholas Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', in *St Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Ramsay, Sparks and Tatton-Brown, pp. 1–23, at p. 13.

⁵¹ Some care needs to be taken when it comes to interpreting styles in which individuals appeared to claim responsibility for personally writing a charter: certain words such as *dictavi* or *depinxi* need imply nothing more than that the individual concerned was searching for a new way of expressing himself. Dunstan's statements, however, clearly go beyond this. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 26–7; Michael Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', in *ALL*, pp. 183–212, at p. 188; and Simon Keynes, 'Edgar, rex admirabilis', in *Edgar, King of the English, 959–975*, ed. Scragg, pp. 3–58, at p. 18 n. 74.

charters' audience in a certain, very specific way; that they wanted to use precise terminology, beyond just *episcopus* or *archiepiscopus*, to describe their offices; and, perhaps most intriguingly, that they were able to communicate their wishes to whoever had been charged with writing the king's charters, who was, in turn, willing and able to indulge them. The king's charters were the most reliable form of communication between the court and the provinces.⁵² Just as Æthelstan had used charters to proclaim the intellectual supremacy of his court, so Ælfheah used his attestation to advertise his own learnedness; so Cenwald used his to broadcast his monastic status; so Dunstan used his to remind the charters' readership of his elevated position at court; and so Oda used his to assert his episcopal authority over the kingdom's secular elite. Charters now spoke not just with the king's voice, but also with the voices of the kingdom's leading churchmen, and the language that they spoke, in the witness lists at least, was markedly more ostentatious than the king's. Whilst it is important to remember that Edmund and Eadred continued to project powerful images of royal power via their charters,⁵³ the ambitious styles of the ecclesiastics are remarkable. At the beginning of Æthelstan's reign, the king had pronounced his personal authority in spectacular terms. He was, in S 399 (928, Glastonbury), *Adelstanus Rex Anglorum hanc meæ munificentiae seu largitatis breviculam atræ fuscationis pallore depictam ac lacrimosa virginei forcipis destillatione fedatam signo sanctæ semperque amandæ crucis corroboravi et subscripsi*, whilst Archbishop Wulfhelm of Canterbury was plain *Dorobernensis ecclesiæ archiepiscopus*. A decade later, England's ecclesiastical hierarchy, who had cottoned on to the propaganda value of the charter, were clearly no longer content with the bland anonymity that had characterised their attestations in earlier years. They, too, were using the king's charters to announce their ascendancy to the kingdom's literary elite.

Eadwig and the reaction

By the time of Eadred's death, powerful factions had formed at court. The influential magnate, Æthelstan 'half-king', a close ally of the monastic reformers (who eventually, and probably not entirely of his own volition, became a monk himself at Glastonbury), controlled huge swathes of the country; Eadgifu, Eadred's mother, was throwing her weight around at court, acting effectively as regent; and, as if that were not trouble enough for Eadwig, a pro-reform bloc of important

⁵² See above, pp. 66–72.

⁵³ On the royal styles of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig, see Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', pp. 6–7.

ecclesiastics, which had coalesced around Dunstan and Oda, had embedded itself at the very heart of the royal government.

Eadwig, unlike his brother, Edgar, was clearly his own man. Immediately on coming to power, he acted to put a stop to all this. Æthelstan 'half king' was cut down to size by the appointments of new ealdormen to administer areas of Mercia formerly overseen by him. Eadgifu had her estates confiscated and was never to attest another charter. Eadwig's reassertion of royal power, moreover, was also directed towards the pro-reform ecclesiastics who had, during Eadred's reign, embedded themselves so deeply in the machinery of government. Stories about Eadwig's anti-monastic views abound, as we might expect, in the accounts of later commentators. Æthelwold, in the preface to his translation of the Rule of St Benedict, accused Eadwig of confiscating the Church's lands;⁵⁴ Eadmer, in his lives of Oda, Dunstan and Oswald, had him quarrelling with the reformers at every opportunity;⁵⁵ and William of Malmesbury even went so far as to accuse him of introducing secular canons (who, in the 960s, would become the *bête noire* of the reformers) at various houses throughout England.⁵⁶ Whilst many of these stories are impossible to verify, Eadwig certainly sent Dunstan, who had boasted so fondly of his closeness to the king only a few years before, into exile for the second time in a decade. Then, in 956, in an attempt to create a new powerbase for himself, he issued more charters than had ever been issued before, or would be again, in the space of a single year before the Conquest. In doing so, he raised whole new families to prominence, almost as though seeking to reconstruct wholesale the English elite.⁵⁷

However, not one charter issued during Eadwig's reign was of the 'Dunstan B' type, and only one alliterative charter (recording a gift from Eadwig to the house at Worcester itself) survives from the years between Eadwig's accession in 955 and Cenwald's death in 958. Moreover, the nature of the bishops' attestations were no longer the conceited boasts of Eadred's reign but, once again, modest statements of semi-anonymous fact. In S 584 (956, Abingdon), the king attests as *Ego Eadwig rex Anglorum hoc donum cum triumpho sancte crucis impressi*, while a much-chastened Oda appears as *Ego Oda archiepiscopus consignaui*. Significantly, the attestations of both Eadred and his brother, Edgar (who attests with *Ego Eadgar frater eiusdem regis confirmaui*), are longer than those of any of the bishops. Also of note

⁵⁴ See Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, eds, *Councils and Synods*, p. 146.

⁵⁵ See Muir and Turner, *Eadmer of Canterbury*, *passim*.

⁵⁶ See R. A. B. Mynors, Rodney Thompson and Michael Winterbottom, eds and trans., *William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum*, OMT, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998–9), I, pp. 238–9.

⁵⁷ On which see Jayakumar, 'Eadwig and Edgar', pp. 88–90; and Sean Miller, 'Eadwig', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Lapidge, Blair, Keynes and Scragg (Oxford, 1999), pp. 151–2.

is an apparent reversal of Oda's tendency to lengthen his style in order to outdo the king; in S 595 (956, Thorney), Oda attested using a slightly different style which was longer than normal: *Ego Odo Dorouernensis Ecclesie archipresul alme crucis signo roborauī* (nine words; Bishop Ælfsige's attestation is also unusual and also runs to nine words). Eadwig's usual style, however, also changed slightly to enable him to go four words better than his bishops: *Ego Eadwin [sic] gratia dei totius britannice telluris rex meum donum proprio sigillo confirmaui* (thirteen words). A similar trait is visible in S 603 (956, Abingdon), S 608 (956, Old Minster, Winchester) and several other charters.

In due course, Oda was permitted to use the slightly more showy *Ego Oda archiepiscopus cum signo sancte crucis roborauī* (which, in some charters, did exceed Eadred's preferred *Ego Eadwig rex Anglorum indeclinabiliter concessi* in length), and the bishops were again allowed to choose their own individual verb, but never again did Oda attest a charter with the grand thirteen- and fifteen-word flourishes of which he had grown so fond during the reigns of Edmund and Eadred. It is very clear that his attestations were no longer consistently intended (or permitted) to overshadow the king's. Meanwhile, Eadwig, in his own styles, resurrected the Graecism, *basileus*, which, with its overtones of imperial power, had been a favourite of Æthelstan's.⁵⁸

This fits neatly against the general background of Eadwig's reign. It makes sense that, just as he sought to secure his position via the promotion of a new, loyal, secular elite at the expense of individuals whose allegiance to him, and perhaps even to his office was questionable, so would he have needed to reassert himself over the powerful ecclesiastics who had dominated the reign of his uncle and would, in time, return to prominence during that of his brother. By getting rid of Dunstan, Eadwig took an important step towards reasserting royal authority over his court. At the same time, by refusing Oda and his bishops the luxury of promoting themselves and their agendas in his charters, he made sure that a clear message of royal, not ecclesiastical, authority was announced to England's literate elite. For anyone who was used to seeing Oda styled *Ego Odo archiepiscopus metropolitano presidens gubernamina hoc donum regia concessum munificentiae signo crucis fixi*, his sudden reversion to *archiepiscopus* must have sent a very clear message indeed about who was really in charge of the kingdom.

⁵⁸ *Basileus* had been used in royal styles for Edmund and Eadred in the main body of several charters; it had not been used in an authentic witness list since Æthelstan's time, however.

Conclusion

In 1852, W. Burnett Coates, an author of bad melodrama in the highest Victorian tradition, and a devout Protestant who was troubled by a deeply held conviction that the pope was planning, at any moment, to stage a Catholic takeover of Britain and her empire,⁵⁹ did his best to redress the balance of historical opinion about the much-maligned King Eadwig. In his *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Edwy and Elgiva, a Tale of the Tenth Century*, the wicked Dunstan and Oda schemed ceaselessly to bring about a dastardly popish plot: 'Odo, also being a zealot', fumed Burnett Coates, 'was deeply imbued with the spirit of [the monastic reform] party, then animating the contending interests; the principal of which was that evoked by Dunstan in pursuit of his ulterior views, regarding the annexation of the kingdom as a province to the Popedom.'⁶⁰ Yet, fortunately for England, King Eadwig was there to frustrate Dunstan's malign ambitions: 'the brave, open-hearted soldier, – the warrior – ever ready to sympathize with the high and aspiring thoughts of the unblemished chivalry which enlarged the breasts of youthful nobles of his country.'⁶¹ In the end, after Ælfgifu had been brutally murdered on Dunstan's direct orders, Eadwig, hearing the news, expired immediately, leaving the kingdom in the hands of 'his rebel brother', Edgar, with his final breath; in an ultimate, dramatic flourish, 'the spirits of the innocent and persecuted fled to the awful courts of another world; there to record a dreadful accusation against the cruel Churchmen; and to rest until the final reckoning.'⁶²

For all that it is refreshing to see a more positive spin being put on Eadwig's reign, W. Burnett Coates's rip-roaring bestseller was, of course, little more than a work of politically motivated histrionic populism (which is not to suggest, of course, that the works of 'B', Byrhtferth, Eadmer and the rest of them were not). Nevertheless, it is striking that so many of those who wrote about Eadwig's reign seized upon his rivalry with the Church, using it (in the case of 'B' *et al.*) to fuel all manner of puerile prattle about his impiety and his unsuitability for high office. What is certain is that, after Æthelstan's death, the influence of a cartel of top ecclesiastics grew rapidly in England. Rather than establishing regional powerbases centred on their respective sees, they sought to exercise power directly from the centre, and taking over some of the responsibility of drafting the king's charters was certainly

⁵⁹ On Burnett Coates and his circle, and on anti-Catholic feeling in Victorian England more generally, see Denis G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, CA, 1992), especially pp. 126–7.

⁶⁰ W. Burnett Coates, *Edwy and Elgiva, A Tale of the Tenth Century* (London, 1852), p. 4

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.

an aspect of this process. At times perhaps, such as during Eadred's reign, their potency at court probably complemented the power of the king; at others, the king seems to have perceived them as a threat to his authority and took steps to limit their reach. The waxing and waning of royal and ecclesiastical authority are clearly visible in the charters of the period. At their zenith, Oda, Dunstan and Cenwald were able not only to promote themselves in the king's charters, but also to oversee the drafting of many of them. Thus, they controlled not only the administrative mechanism of charter production, but also, more importantly, the way in which the king expressed and presented himself to the literate elite of the kingdom.

In reality, the only actor to emerge with much credit from this complicated and often dangerous power-play was the charter itself. By the 950s, its role as a reliable and very potent form of communication between the court and the rest of the kingdom, as a verbal portrait of the king, and as a trustworthy vehicle for positive public relations was unassailable. Having the ability to control the production of royal charters and, perhaps even more importantly, possessing the capacity to decide exactly how they, personally, were presented in their texts, was every bit as fundamental to the ambitions of England's leading churchmen as it was vital to the effective exercise of royal power. In the 940s and 950s, Oda, Cenwald and Dunstan had obtained a glimpse of what might, in the right circumstances, be possible; in the 960s and 970s, Dunstan and his cronies would put this experience to good use.

Back to the Future: Edgar and 'Edgar A'

In many ways, Edgar's reign can be seen as the high-water mark of the whole Anglo-Saxon age. From the infighting that had fractured English politics in the 950s, Edgar emerged as a force for unity under whose judicious guidance art, literature, scholarship and scribal culture flourished throughout England. Edgar 'the peaceable', as he later became known, has been seen by many as the archetypal medieval king: pious, wise, firm, fair and scholarly, his virtues were apparently legion.

Except, of course, that they almost certainly were not. The main reason why Edgar is remembered as such a fine king is that most of what was written about him during his reign flowed from the pens of the monastic reformers and their sympathisers, of whom Edgar was an enthusiastic and generous patron. In reality, the fierce backlash against reformed monasticism after Edgar's death, the murder of Edward, his son and successor in 978, and the rapidity with which the Anglo-Saxon state disintegrated into chaos during the reign of Æthelred 'the Unready' suggest strongly that the politicking, intrigue and factionalism of the 950s had, at best, been brushed under the carpet by Edgar and the reformers.

On account of these competing views of Edgar, his charters are all the more important as tools for evaluating the true nature of his reign. Yet, as with so much about this enigmatic king, even they seem to suggest conflicting, and (on the face of it) irreconcilable narratives. Overall, of about 160 extant documents issued in Edgar's name between 957 and 975, 102 may be considered largely authentic.¹ They form a fascinating and convoluted series, within which at least four distinct traditions, which can themselves be further subdivided, are apparent. Some have wondered whether such diversification should be seen as an indicator of the corrosion of the royal writing office, and of the devolution of charter-production back to the provinces. In the light of all that the charter had become in the tenth century – a method of communication, a statement of the king's power and of the

¹ Simon Keynes considered about a hundred to be substantially authentic; see Simon Keynes, 'A Conspectus of Edgar's Charters', in *Edgar, King of the English 959–75*, ed. Scragg, pp. 60–82, especially pp. 62, and 64–75.

learnedness of his court, and so on – such a theory has far-reaching implications for Anglo-Saxon diplomatic. If the royal court no longer had direct control over how the king's charters looked, then the king's personal authority, his presence within his own kingdom and his capacity to communicate with his subjects and with posterity would all have been seriously eroded, all at a time when royal power in Anglo-Saxon England was supposed to be at its zenith.

However, it may well be the case that the diversification visible amongst Edgar's charters points not towards the weakening of royal power but, on the contrary, to the increasing sophistication of the Anglo-Saxon administration. During the reigns of Edmund and Eadred, Dunstan and Cenwald were, at different times, given the job of producing royal charters; during Æthelstan's reign, it seems that Bishop Ælfwine of Lichfield was similarly employed; Edgar, rather than trusting just one or two people with the vital job of writing the his charters, now seems to have devolved the responsibility upon at least four (almost certainly more) who were regularly employed, year after year, specifically for that purpose. While each of them may have had his own writing style and preferred set of formulae, all were, above all, responsible for encapsulating and projecting Edgar's ruler-ideology in broadly similar terms.

Beyond such questions of production, the language and style of Edgar's charters also throw up some interesting points. The charters were written, for the most part, in competent though not spectacular Latin. Indeed, it is interesting that, at a time when 'hermeneutic' Latin was at its height in the literature of the monastic reformers, the prose that was used for the king's charters was comparatively restrained. It was also not very original: although a few new words and phrases were introduced into the diplomatic vocabulary from time to time, the majority of the prose was formulaic and, interestingly, rather derivative. Since Edmund's reign, charter draftsmen had begun to look to the past for inspiration, drawing vocabulary, phrases and sometimes whole formulae from much earlier charters. The charters of Æthelstan's chancery provided rich pickings, of course, but so did those from the reigns of Edward and Alfred. During Edgar's reign, this trait accelerated noticeably as the king's draftsmen trawled their archives for more phrases to copy. Looking to the past for inspiration was nothing new, of course: draftsmen had been doing that since the ninth century at least. During Edgar's reign, however, charter draftsmen seem to have acquired a new appreciation of their own heritage.

The production of Edgar's charters

At first sight, Edgar's charters form a daunting series. In addition to a hundred or so authentic extant documents, roughly sixty texts survive which may, to different extents, preserve some authentic material, but are problematic in their current forms. Several other charters in Edgar's name are known, but have been lost. The complete corpus has been comprehensively catalogued and discussed by Simon Keynes.²

From amongst the hundred or so authentic documents, a number of distinct groups emerge. Firstly, a steady stream of 'Dunstan B' charters, not all of which the king attested,³ were written throughout Edgar's reign; then there are a handful of charters which disposed of land and were preserved in the south-west, and which, if they were not actually produced there, may at least reflect some kind of local tradition;⁴ then there are the charters produced by the agency known as 'Edgar A'; and finally there are the 'mainstream' documents. 'Mainstream' is a rather misleading term in the context of Edgar's reign. These charters are not consistently linked together by virtue of the occurrence of repeated common features (although all sorts of groups and subgroups are visible amongst them). Instead, they are classified on the not-altogether-satisfactory basis that they do not fall into any the other categories.⁵ Even a cursory examination of Edgar's charters demonstrates at once that all four types of charter were issued alongside each other throughout Edgar's reign (see below, pp. 162–9). At no point did one agency eclipse the others or establish a monopoly over charter production.

Just as was the case during Eadred's reign, it seems that expediency and geographical convenience may, in some cases, have played a role in deciding who would write a charter. The south-west charters were, with one exception (S 810, 961×963, St Kew), preserved at Exeter and all disposed of estates in Devon or Cornwall. However, the 'Dunstan B' charters, which had been associated with Dunstan and Glastonbury

² Ibid.

³ See below, p. 162.

⁴ On these documents, see Charles Insley, 'Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria in the Anglo-Saxon Southwest', *EME* 7 (1998): 173–97; and Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', p. 15 n. 62, and p. 19. The 'south-west' group are not united by the consistent use of idiosyncratic formulae in the same way as, say, the 'Dunstan B' charters. Rather, these documents, which were all preserved at Exeter or St Kew, look out of step with contemporary diplomatic styles and do not fit comfortably into any of the other categories. Their shared provenance, and the compelling case made by Insley for a degree of local production justify their grouping.

⁵ On Edgar's 'mainstream' charters, see Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', pp. 13–18; 'A Conspectus', pp. 60–82; and 'Church Councils', p. 97.

in their first incarnation during the reign of Eadred,⁶ were now used much more freely, as Table 27 demonstrates.⁷

Table 27

Charter and date	Location of estate	Archive
S 676, 958	Essex	Old Minster, Winchester
S 676a, 958	Warwickshire	Coventry
S 678, 958	Oxfordshire	Abingdon
S 726, 964	Worcestershire	Worcester
S 735, 965	Somerset	Bath
S 743, 966	Somerset	Glastonbury (grant made directly to Glastonbury Abbey)
S 750, 967	Buckinghamshire or Northamptonshire	Abingdon
S 785, 972	Somerset	Bath
S 790, 973	Berkshire	Old Minster, Winchester
S 791, 973	Somerset	Glastonbury (grant made directly to Glastonbury Abbey)
S 794a, 974	Hertfordshire	Westminster
S 802, 975	Shropshire	Old Minster, Winchester
S 803, 975	Sussex	Old Minster, Winchester

Clearly, there is no bias towards Glastonbury here. Keynes wondered, therefore, if the 'Dunstan B' charters of Edgar's reign may have been in some way connected with Dunstan, who had probably left Glastonbury (where he seems to have been replaced by a certain Ælfric, who was himself succeeded as abbot by Sigegar, the future bishop of Wells)⁸ to become a bishop in 958, before being elevated to Canterbury in 960. A connection with Dunstan is certainly possible; it may also be the case, however, that the diplomatic model that had been developed by Dunstan (or by somebody in his circle) during Eadred's reign had simply entered wider usage during Edgar's. Indeed, this is exactly what seems to have happened to the formulae of the 'Edgar A' charters after 963.⁹

The greatest question looming over Edgar's charters, however, is one of consistency. Why should the king's charters look so different? If the

⁶ See Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" Charters', pp. 176–7, 185–7 and 190–1.

⁷ For a comprehensive list of all the 'Dunstan B' charters issued during Edgar's reign, including those which are probably spurious, see *ibid.*, pp. 176–9.

⁸ See Sarah Foot, 'Glastonbury's Early Abbots', in *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey: Essays in Honour of the Ninetieth Birthday of C. A. Raleigh Radford*, ed. Lesley Abrams and James P. Carley (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 163–90, especially p. 189.

⁹ See below, pp. 169–75.

agencies producing them were all working for the king, then why did they not produce documents which were much more similar in their formulae, Latin styles and diplomatic procedures? The answer lies entirely in how one interprets 'difference'. At first sight, a 'Dunstan B' charter is clearly very different from an 'Edgar A' charter. The 'Edgar A' charters, in turn, are often quite distinct from the 'mainstream' documents that were written alongside them. However, the criteria used to measure 'difference' by a twenty-first-century diplomatic historian and a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charter draftsman are not necessarily the same. It is absolutely clear that Anglo-Saxon diplomatic had never in its history achieved, or sought to achieve, absolute consistency. Even products of the same draftsman ('Æthelstan A', for example) could look very different. Consistency, for the Anglo-Saxons, especially in the tenth century, did not mean writing exactly the same words in exactly the same order every time; that would have been far too boring. Instead, consistency meant achieving the same outcome and conveying the same message. Accordingly, it is the proems and sanctions of Edgar's charters which vary the most. These were the 'literary' parts of the charter, the parts which, whilst they provided a splendid opportunity for a draftsman to air some of his favourite Graecisms, did not actually 'do' much in a legal or a political sense. Rather, it was the royal style, the dispositive section and the dating clause which were essential if the charter were to function as a legally binding record and, moreover, as a statement of the king's authority. And here, unsurprisingly, Edgar's charters achieved a striking level of consistency.

First of all, the 'Dunstan B', 'south-west', 'Edgar A', and 'mainstream' traditions also contain significant formulaic links to each other, and to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon diplomatic more generally. For instance, S 755 (967, Exeter), is one of several charters from the 'south-west' group to share substantial elements of its formulation with other 'mainstream' diplomas, in this case from Eadwig's reign.¹⁰ Likewise, the phrase *decreta pontificum et verba sacerdotum uti montium fundamenta indistrictis ligaminibus stabilita sint*, which was used by 'Edgar A' (S 696, 961, Old Minster, Winchester), had been in use since at least 944 (S 493, 944, Wilton). Similar features are visible in most of Edgar's charters.¹¹

There are other consistent features, too. For instance, six certainly authentic charters in Edgar's name are extant from the year 967. Three contain elements typical of 'Edgar A' formulation (S 747, S 748, S 754); one is from the 'south-west' group (S 755); one is 'mainstream' (S 751); and one is a 'Dunstan B' charter (S 750). On the face of it, they look

¹⁰ The invocation and proem of this charter are shared with S 663 (956, Abingdon), a standard product of Eadwig's chancery. See Insley, 'Charters and Scriptoria', p. 187.

¹¹ Simon Keynes made a similar observation in 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', p. 22 n. 98.

quite different from each other. Yet, in each charter, those sections which governed the political and legal operation of the document changed very little, as can be seen from a comparison of the royal styles (Table 28).

Table 28

Charter	Royal style in main body	Royal style in witness list
S 747 (‘Edgar A’)	Ego Edgar tocus Britannie basileus	Ego Edgar rex Anglorum consensi
S 748 (‘Edgar A’)	ego Eadgar tocus Anglorum gentis primicerius	Ego Eadgar Rex tocus Brittanniæ prefatam donationem cum sigillo sanctæ crucis confirmavi
S 750 (‘Dunstan B’)	Ego Eadgar diuina allubescence gratia rex et primicerius Anglorum	Ego Eadgar rex Anglorum hoc donum largitus sum
S 751 (‘mainstream’)	Ego Eadgar sua munificentia basileos Anglorum et rex atque imperator sub ipso domino regum et nationum infra fines Brittanniæ commorantium	Ego Eadgar rex Anglorum hanc meam munificentiam et mei ministri donationem signo sanctæ crucis confirmavi
S 754 (‘Edgar A’)	ego Eadgar tocus Albionis basileus	Ego Eadgar Rex tocus Bryttanniæ prefatam donationem cum sigillo sanctæ crucis confirmavi
S 755 (‘south-west’)	ego Eadgar rex Anglorum telluris gubernator et rector	Ego Eadgar gratia Dei totius Britanniae telluris rex meum donum proprio sigillo confirmavi

First of all, it is worth noting that even amongst charters from the same group, there was no absolute consistency. S 747 and S 748 are both products of ‘Edgar A’, yet neither gives Edgar exactly the same title nor describes his authority in an identical manner. What is significant is that, in all the charters from 967, Edgar’s office and the extent of his authority are presented, often in somewhat extravagant terms, in much the same way. Always, he is the ruler (*rex*, *primicerius*, *gubernator et rector*, *basileos*, *imperator*) of someone or somewhere (*Anglorum*, *Britanniae*, *Albionis*). In the witness lists he is, without exception, *rex*. Furthermore, it is not only the royal styles which exhibit such consistency: most of the 967 charters also use a similar formula to introduce their sanctions (all except the ‘Dunstan B’ charter combine the words *si quis* and *donationem*); all except the ‘Dunstan B’ charter have vernacular boundary clauses; all use comparable dating formulae and, moreover, give the date *anno domini*. These documents probably represent the work of at least four different individuals; yet

the structural and procedural similarities between them demonstrate very clearly that, overall, they were striving to achieve the same thing: a stylistically competent, legally valid document which, most importantly, glorified King Edgar's office consistently, projecting the image of an all-powerful ruler whose quasi-imperial authority extended over both people and territory.

This sense of a shared purpose is emphasised further by the comparatively quotidian Latin used not only for the 967 charters, but for almost all the diplomas drawn up in Edgar's name. Edgar's draftsmen wrote good Latin, but it was not particularly innovative or ambitious. Of course, there were a few Graecisms here and there; but Edgar's charters were certainly not of the same order of complexity as Æthelstan's, or even of the alliterative charters. Yet, there is no doubt whatever that, in the 960s and 970s, standards of Latinity in England were exceptionally high. While charters were being churned out in competent but largely unremarkable Latin, contemporary literature became increasingly characterised by the use of 'hermeneutic' Latin, with all its grand, poetic language, tortuous syntactical acrobatics and obscure vocabulary.

The differences between the Latin styles used for charters and literature in the 960s and 970s was probably deliberate and may, moreover, be another factor which links Edgar's charters together as a coherent group. A striking feature of the 'Dunstan B' charters had always been their relative simplicity, which was in stark contrast to the much more ostentatious style employed by Dunstan elsewhere. Probably, the reason for this was that Dunstan wanted to reserve the 'hermeneutic' style for works associated with the monastic reform.¹² It may be the case that, during Edgar's reign, with the reform party at the zenith of its power, this same tendency was expanded to cover the writing the king's charters. Significantly, there is good evidence from the 960s and 970s to suggest that different literary styles were used in order to appeal to different audiences. The work of Æthelwold is perhaps the best example of this process. At quite an early stage in the process of the English Benedictine reform, Æthelwold seems to have taken on the role of the reformers' director of communications. Certainly, the longest, best-known and most explicitly pro-reform tracts to emerge from the 960s and 970s – namely *Regularis concordia*, the New Minster Refoundation Charter, and 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries' – were probably all written by him.¹³ Despite

¹² See above, pp. 145–6.

¹³ On Æthelwold's authorship of these texts, see Dorothy Whitelock, 'The Authorship of the Account of King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries', in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt*, Janua linguarum. Series maior 37, ed. James L. Rosier (The Hague, 1970), pp. 125–36.

their shared authorship, the styles of these texts varied significantly. The main body of *Regularis concordia*, which is a manifesto of the reformers' religious and political goals, was written in comparatively straightforward Latin; there are a few ornaments here and there, and the odd Aldhelmism, but the Latin is not especially challenging. The *prohemium* to *Regularis concordia* is a different matter altogether, however: much more flamboyant than the main text, it 'reveals Æthelwold as a proficient Latinist, familiar with the language of Aldhelm and of Christian Latin poetry'.¹⁴ Like the *prohemium*, but unlike *Regularis concordia* itself, the New Minster Refoundation Charter (S 745) was written in a spectacularly over-the-top style, and is an imposing example of 'hermeneutic' Latin in all its finery. Then, 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries' was composed in comparatively straightforward Old English, perhaps prefiguring the reaction against 'hermeneutic' Latinity that would characterise the vernacular writings of Ælfric later in the century. Indeed, there is good evidence that the curriculum at Winchester delivered teaching in both English and Latin, so perhaps it is no surprise to see Æthelwold switching, apparently effortlessly, from one language to the other.¹⁵

Above all, the variety of styles in which these texts were written proves the very significant point that Æthelwold (who was presumably not alone in being able to do this) was able to change gear, adapting his style of writing to suit different audiences, different genres and different purposes as appropriate.¹⁶ On one level, 'hermeneutic' Latinity became synonymous with the reformers as they sought to present themselves as being separate from (and intellectually superior to) their rivals.¹⁷ But, on another, they were clearly capable of expressing themselves more simply when the context demanded it. Presumably, the style of Latin (or English) that was used for a given text depended upon that text's intended audience. *Regularis concordia* was a statement of religious and political philosophy; if it were to be effective in winning over critics of the reform and in converting new supporters to the cause then it had to be understood by as many people as possible, hence its comparatively straightforward style. The same thing may be true of 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries'. The New Minster Refoundation charter, however, was aimed at a very different

¹⁴ Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', p. 194.

¹⁵ See Michael Lapidge, 'Three Latin Poems from Æthelwold's School at Winchester', in *ALL*, pp. 225–278; Helmut Gneuss, 'The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester', *ASE* 1 (1972): 63–83; and Walter Hofstetter, 'Winchester and the Standardization of Old English Vocabulary', *ASE* 17 (1988): 139–61.

¹⁶ This phenomenon has been commented on elsewhere. See Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style', p. 128.

¹⁷ See Cubitt, 'The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England', p. 89; and Stephenson, 'Scapegoating the Secular Clergy'.

audience. A large, lavishly decorated manuscript, it records, in the grandest terms possible, Edgar's refoundation of the New Minster as a Benedictine house under Æthelwold's supervision. Unlike *Regularis concordia*, it is less a statement of aims than a firm record of those aims having been carried out at the command of no less a figure than the king himself. There is little doubt that, whereas most charters were tucked away in a dusty reliquary once they had been written, S 745 was meant to be seen and read. Æthelwold's audience were not merely the literary elite, but the select few amongst that elite who would be able to see the manuscript and understand its complicated prose; his purpose was to amaze, to delight, to glorify the reform and King Edgar, its most important patron, and to make an unequivocal statement about the dazzling erudition of the movement.¹⁸ Moreover, the charter was designed to justify the king's involvement in the violent expulsion of the secular canons from the New Minster by Æthelwold in 964, which was highly controversial and, if Æthelwold's biographer, Wulfstan of Winchester, is to be believed, provoked an assassination attempt against the bishop.¹⁹

S 745, along with one or two other documents, suggests that, when circumstances demanded it, the grandest style of 'hermeneutic' Latin could be used for a charter. Those circumstances seem to have been governed chiefly by the wishes of the reform party: whenever the reformers wished to make use of a charter to broadcast a message about their learnedness, or about the intellectual achievements of their ideology, they used 'hermeneutic' Latin to make their point. Otherwise, charters generally reverted to a style that was competent, certainly, but otherwise unembellished.

As with S 745, S 690 (961, Abingdon) was one of those charters in which grand, 'hermeneutic' Latin was deployed. The way it was used, however, seems to give further weight to the idea that this style of Latin was reserved for specific circumstances. In the main, this charter is a typical product of 'Edgar A'. Written in interesting, but comparatively straightforward Latin, it is a fairly standard product of this draftsman. However, by virtue of its survival as an original single sheet, it is possible to see that a second scribe took over from 'Edgar

¹⁸ On this remarkable document see, and on Æthelwold's authorship of it in particular, see (amongst others): Whitelock, 'The Authorship', p. 131; Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 81, n. 163; EHD, pp. 378–9; Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style', p. 127; and Alexander Rumble, *Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester: Documents Relating to the Topography of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman City and its Minsters*, Winchester Studies 4 (Oxford, 2002), p. 66.

¹⁹ See Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', p. 104; Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, pp. 236–7; and Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 85–6.

A' to write the witness list.²⁰ Not only does the script change here, but the whole style and feel of the Latin moves up a gear:

Ego Eadgar Britanniae Anglorum monarchus hoc taumate agiae crucis roborauī. Ego Dunstan Dorobernensis æclesiæ archiepiscopus eiusdem regis beniuolentiam concessi. Ego Oscytel Aeboracensis basilicæ priamas in seignis hoc donum regale confirmaui. Ego Osulf presul canonica subscriptione manu propria hilaris subscripsi. Ego Byrhtelm blebi dei famulus iubente rege signum sancte crucis letus impressi. Ego Apulf pontifex testudinem agiae crucis intepidus hoc donum corroboraui. Ego Ælfstan antistes trofheum sancte crucis hanc regis donationem consolidaui. Ego Oswold legis Dei catascopus hoc eulogium propria manu depinxi

This witness list is liberally scattered with obscure Graceisms and unusual vocabulary (*taumate*, *blebi*, *hilaris*, *agiae*, *trofheum*, *catascopus*) which is clearly designed to distinguish it stylistically from the fairly standard diplomatic Latin which preceded it. Clearly, just had been the case with the attestations of the ecclesiastics in the charters of Edmund and Eadred, these grand styles were designed to project a sense of each man's personal presence in the document. More than this, though, the 'hermeneutic' Latin of these attestations was likely designed to project a message of monastic exceptionalism, announcing the unity and potency of the reform party (of which, if his own grand style is anything to go by, Edgar was clearly considered to be a member).

Overall, rather than indicating a deterioration of central control over charter production, the diversification of formulae and styles visible across Edgar's charters suggests that the Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy had expanded and evolved, and that it had become markedly more sophisticated in the process. Essentially, responsibility for writing the king's charters was given to whichever 'approved' agency was most convenient at the time.²¹ But, whoever got the job was obviously compelled to abide by a series of guidelines: the charters had to be dated in a certain way, the king's office described in certain terms, the boundary clause (if there was one) recorded in the vernacular, and so on. There is no doubt that these guidelines were both enforced (either implicitly or proactively)²² and strictly adhered to, since the

²⁰ Lapidge wondered whether this may have been the work of Oswald himself: 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', p. 187.

²¹ Henry Loyn made a similar observation, in *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500–1087*, p. 108.

²² Proactive enforcement may imply the existence of a 'chancellor' who was charged with ensuring a certain level of consistency in the king's charters. There is no firm evidence of such an office having existed in Anglo-Saxon England prior to the reign of Edward 'the Confessor', on which see Keynes, 'Regenbald the Chancellor (sic)'.

overwhelming majority of Edgar's charters exhibited such features. There may even have been a required Latin style for charters, which was deliberately set at a level below the 'hermeneutic' Latin of the reformers. The existence of such a system is a clear indication not only of the extent of Edgar's royal authority, but also of the sophistication of the Anglo-Saxon administration in the 960s and 970s.

'Edgar A' and Abingdon (again)

'Æthelstan A', 'Æthelstan C', 'Dunstan B' and the author of the alliterative charters are all enigmatic, semi-anonymous individuals, about whom we would dearly love to know just a little more, but, in the absence of some extraordinary new discovery, probably never will. All have, in their own ways, precipitated their fair share of scholarly debate. However, the title of Anglo-Saxon England's most controversial charter draftsman must go to 'Edgar A'. It is not his Latin that has caused all the fuss: he was a respectable Latinist, but no virtuoso. Rather, it has been the nature of his employment that has led at least three generations of usually placid, amiable, and unassuming Anglo-Saxonists into acrimonious sectarianism.

Largely because of the apparent frequency with which the 'Edgar A' charters survived in the Abingdon archive, early commentators, including Richard Drögereit who first identified them, wondered if their scribe might have been based there, and, moreover, if he might have been Abbot Æthelwold himself.²³ In 1980, Simon Keynes argued that the Abingdon connection was a red herring: of course those charters which recorded gifts to Abingdon itself (S 690, S 700 and S 708 were grants directly to the abbey) were going to be preserved at that house, he pointed out. 'Edgar A', he thought, was 'a scribe in permanent attendance on the king [...] in his personal service'.²⁴

However, in the introduction to her edition of the charters of Abingdon, published at the beginning of the 2000s, Susan Kelly revived the connection between Abingdon and 'Edgar A'.²⁵ Her argument was as ingenious as it was sophisticated and hinged, in the main, on the controversial identification of S 658 and S 673 as authentic charters rather than forgeries. Neither charter is blatantly spurious by any means, but both have problems.²⁶ More recently, Simon Keynes again

²³ Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?' p. 416; Chaplais, 'Origin and Authenticity', p. 42; and Terence A. M. Bishop, 'Notes on Cambridge Manuscripts, Part IV: MSS connected with St Augustine's Canterbury', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 2 (1957): 323–36, at p. 333. Hart, *Early Charters of Northern England*, p. 25.

²⁴ Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 75.

²⁵ Kelly, *Abingdon*, pp. lxxxiv–xcii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxvii–xcviii, 340–1, and 347–8.

rejected the connection between 'Edgar A' and Abingdon, arguing that 'there is no compelling reason to connect the charters of 'Edgar A' with Æthelwold in particular, or with Abingdon'.²⁷

Whether or not he had any involvement, directly or indirectly, in the 'Edgar A' charters, it seems that Æthelwold did once write a charter: S 745.²⁸ This highly unusual document, which bridges the gap between diplomatic and literature more than any other, is vastly longer than any other extant Anglo-Saxon royal diploma (even those written by 'Æthelstan A') and is more a work of reformist propaganda than a record of a grant of privileges. Written in extraordinarily grand Latin, it is an example of the 'hermeneutic' style at its most clotted and befuddling. Accordingly, it contains a wealth of unprecedented vocabulary, some of which had little or no history in Anglo-Latin literature, let alone in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic.²⁹ A particularly interesting aspect of S 745 is that the royal styles and dating clause are consistent with the rest of Edgar's charters. In the main body of the text, Edgar is styled *Eadgar diuina fauente gratia totius Albionis basileus*, and in the witness list he is *Eadgar diuina largiente gratia Anglorum basileus*, both of which were in common contemporary usage. The dating clause, likewise, is given using the incarnation. There is no doubt that Æthelwold, when he wrote S 745, was familiar with at least some of the practices of Edgar's chancery and, moreover, felt compelled to use them. It is very telling indeed that, even in so magnificent a document as the New Minster Refoundation Charter, Edgar's presence was still recorded in the same way as in the most straightforward chancery product. Clearly, a very considerable emphasis indeed was placed on consistency when it came to presenting the king's office.

Overall, perhaps it does not really matter very much whether 'Edgar A' was an Abingdon scribe or not, or even whether he was

²⁷ Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', p. 18. Compare with Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 60–1.

²⁸ On S 745 more generally, and on Æthelwold's authorship of it in particular, see (amongst others): Whitelock, 'The Authorship', p. 131; Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 81, n. 163; *EHD*, pp. 378–9; Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style', p. 127; and Rumble, *Property and Piety*, pp. 65–73. Rumble's fine edition and courageous translation of S 745 may be found in the same volume, pp. 74–97.

²⁹ It is worth noting that there are few links between S 745 and the 'Edgar A' charters: of the dozens of words from S 745 which had never been used in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic before Edgar's accession in 957, only one, *abolitus* (which was so common a word that little meaningful significance can be assigned to it), had also been used by 'Edgar A'. There are, moreover, no convincing formulaic links between S 745 and the 'Edgar A' charters; those formulae which do appear in both for the most part relate to Edgar's royal style, to the dispositive and dating clauses and to the witness lists. All were sufficiently common in the 960s and 970s that they cannot be taken as evidence of shared authorship. However, given the ease with which Æthelwold could alter his style, and given the tendency towards writing most charters in much more straightforward Latin (see above, pp. 000–000), this does not necessarily rule Æthelwold out of the picture.

Æthelwold or somebody in his circle. It is well attested that, in the 940s and 950s, the production of charters was, for various reasons, outsourced to Cenwald and Dunstan. There is also good reason to believe that 'Æthelstan A' might have been Ælfwine of Lichfield. For that matter, during Edgar's reign, 'Edgar A' was one of at least four different agencies responsible for producing the king's charters. Simply because a leading ecclesiastic (who, necessarily, was connected to a certain house) was responsible for drafting royal diplomas whilst he was in attendance on the king certainly does not mean that charter production reverted to the locality from which he hailed. 'Edgar A' was certainly operating under the auspices of the royal court when he wrote the king's charters, and that is what counts.³⁰

Analysis of Latin style used by 'Edgar A' is complicated somewhat by the difficulties that surround the chronology of his career. The earliest charters certainly to have been drafted by him date from 960. However, two documents from 959, it has been suggested, demonstrate a prototype of his style and may be early productions. Furthermore, a charter from Eadwig's reign (S 626, 956, Glastonbury), displays many features that would become typical of the style of 'Edgar A', although the authenticity of this text is far from certain.³¹ Between 959 and 963, 'Edgar A' charters were comparatively numerous and easy to spot on account of their clear formulaic similarities and other shared features. The extant single sheets, moreover, were all written (at least partially) by the same hand. No 'Edgar A' charter survived from 964 or 965; then, in 966, 'Edgar A' formulae reappeared, but in a more diluted and less coherent pattern than before. The draftsman of the later series may have been trained by 'Edgar A', or (perhaps more likely) 'Edgar A' formulae may have entered the diplomatic mainstream.³²

In evaluating the style of 'Edgar A', then, it is best to focus only on the clearest phase of his career, namely on those charters issued between 959 and 963. Including those documents which have been considered the early work of 'Edgar A', these are shown in Table 29.³³

What is immediately striking about the work of 'Edgar A', especially once it is compared with the alliterative charters and with the work of 'Æthelstan A', is its consistency. Although a range of different

³⁰ Charles Insley, referring to the 'south-west' charters, made a similar observation: 'Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria', pp. 196–7.

³¹ S 626, whilst not an outright forgery, does not inspire confidence. See Kelly, *Glastonbury*, pp. 473–8. S 607 (956, Abingdon) also contains a typical, 'Edgar A' sanction; the authenticity of this document, however, is much disputed: in its favour, see Kelly, *Abingdon*, pp. 244–6; for an alternative view, see Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 50, 54–6 and 63–4.

³² Simon Keynes suggested the former view: *Diplomas*, p. 74. He restated this view, more or less, in 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', pp. 18–21.

³³ Neither S 680 nor S 681 are definitely 'Edgar A' charters; both, however, contain elements of the formulation that would become typical of his work. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 75–6.

Table 29

Charter	Date	Archive	Location of estate	Recipient
S 680	959	Old Minster, Winchester	Hampshire	Ælfwine, <i>minister</i>
S 681	959	Peterborough	Yorkshire	Quen, <i>matrona</i>
S 683	960	Old Minster, Winchester	Hampshire	Bishop Beorhthelm of Winchester
S 687*	960	Abingdon	Berkshire, Hampshire and Sussex	Wulfric, <i>minister</i>
S 690*	961	Abingdon	Hampshire	Abingdon Abbey
S 696	961	Old Minster, Winchester	Wiltshire	Byrnsige, <i>minister</i>
S 698	961	Abingdon	Oxfordshire?	Eadric, <i>minister</i>
S 700	962	Abingdon	Berkshire	Abingdon Abbey
S 703*	962	Bury St Edmunds	Suffolk	Æthelflæd, <i>matrona</i>
S 706*	962	Uncertain (possibly Wilton)	Wiltshire	Titstan, <i>cubicularius</i>
S 708	963	Abingdon	Sussex	Abingdon Abbey
S 709	963	Wells	Somerset	Ælfric, <i>minister</i>
S 710	963	Shaftesbury	Dorset	Ælfsige, <i>minister</i>
S 711	963	Bath	Somerset	Ælfsige, <i>decurio</i>
S 714	963	Abingdon	Sussex	Bishop Æthelwold
S 716	963	York	Yorkshire	Gunner, <i>dux</i>
S 717*	963	Christ Church, Canterbury	Essex	Ingeram
S 718	963	Old Minster, Winchester	Sussex	Church of St Andrew at Meon
S 719	963	Wilton	Wiltshire	Wynstan, <i>camerarius</i>
S 720	963	Burton	Warwickshire and ?Worcestershire	Wulfgeat, <i>minister</i>
S 722	963	Abingdon	Unknown	Wulfnoth, <i>minister</i>

* Single sheets.

Table 30

Reading in S 700	Variant ^a
vitæ periculis nimio	uite periculum immo (S 710)
terrore recidivi terminus cosmi	terrore recidiui terminis cosmi (S 710)
	terrore redimiui cosmi (S 716)
patescit quod huius	patescit quid huius (S 716)

^a This table only records those instances where a word or whole phrase is different. It does not record orthographical variants of the same word.

formulae were used, wherever the same formula occurred more than once, it was usually recycled as precisely as possible. Although 'Edgar A' was clearly a single person, there is little of the authorial tinkering that characterised the work of earlier charter draftsmen. Between 959 and 963, the first part of his career, 'Edgar A' employed at least nine different proems. The most common of these appears in S 700 (962, Abingdon), S 706 (962, ?Wilton), S 710 (963, Shaftesbury), S 711 (963, Bath), S 714 (963, Abingdon), S 716 (963, York):

Altithrono in æternum regnante universis sophiæ studium intento
mentis conamine sedulo rimantibus liquido patescit quod huius vitæ
periculis nimio ingruentibus terrore recidivi terminus cosmi appropin-
quare dinoscitur ut veridica Christi promulgat sententia qua dicit,
'Surget gens contra gentem et regnum adversus regnum' et reliqua.

Amongst these documents, the level of variation is minimal. Of these charters, S 706 is the earliest single sheet and is, therefore, likely to preserve the best 'original' reading of the proem. A comparison of the proem of S 706 with those of the rest of this group of charters suggests strongly that 'Edgar A' was aiming, above all, for consistency (Table 30).

The variant readings here are most likely to be scribal errors, where a subsequent copyist confused minim strokes, misremembered a word or missed a word out altogether. Each time 'Edgar A' wrote this proem, therefore, he seems to have been aiming to replicate it as closely as possible.

When it came to writing sanctions, 'Edgar A' was even less imaginative. All but one (S 687, 960, Abingdon) of the 'Edgar A' charters issued between 960 and 963 used the same sanction:

Siquis autem nostram donationem in aliud quam constituimus
transferre uoluerit priuatus consortio sancte Dei ecclesiae æternis
barathri incendiis lugubris iugiter cum Iuda Christi proditore eiusque
complicibus puniatur si non satisfactione emendauerit congrua quod
contra nostrum deliquit decretum.

Of these, S 690 is the earliest single sheet and so serves as the 'original' text here:

In all eighteen documents that contain this sanction, significant variants are few and far between. In the clear majority of cases, the variants that occur are scribal errors, just as was the case with the proems. However, S 703, which is an original single sheet, contains a notable variant. The general meaning of the sanction is not changed dramatically, but the words used to express it are different. Initially, the word *privatus* is replaced by *segragatus*, which is a synonym. After this, though, the sanction of S 703 departs quite dramatically from the

Table 31

Reading in S 690	Variants
Siquis autem nostram donationem	Si quis igitur hanc nostram donationem (S 683, S 696, S 700, S 708, S 710, S 711, S 714, S 716, S 717, S 718, S 719, S 722)
	Si quis vero hanc nostram donationem (S 703)
	Si quis autem hanc nostram donationem (S 706, S 720)
Iuda Christi proditore	Juda proditore Christi (S 683)
priuatus consortio sancte Dei	sit ipse segregatus a consortio sancte
ecclesiae æternis barathri incendiis	Dei æcclesiæ necnon et a communione
lugubris iugiter cum Iuda Christi	omnium fidelium nisi prius hic ante
proditore eiusque complicitibus	obitum suum reus penituerit quod
puniatur si non satisfactioe	contra nostram deliquit decretum
emendauerit congrua quod contra	(S 703)
nostrum deliquit decretum	

standard model. In fact, the sanction of S 703 is actually much more straightforward. Whereas the standard sanction presents the reader with some impressive and intimidating imagery, conveyed via some relatively challenging vocabulary (*barathri*, *lugubris*), S 703 threatens excommunication in much more mundane language.

The evidence of the proems and sanctions of the pre-963 'Edgar A' charters, then, certainly does not point firmly in the direction of 'Edgar A' being somebody who was able or willing to rework the formulae he used in the same way as 'Æthelstan A' had in the 920s and 930s, or even in the same way as the draftsman of the alliterative charters had in the 940s and 950s. This suggests either that 'Edgar A' did not have the authority to alter the prose he wrote, or, perhaps more likely, that there was no need for him to do so. Either way, a formulary of some kind must have underpinned the 'Edgar A' charters; it is scarcely credible that a single person (let alone a team of people) could have remembered each of these formulae so precisely had they not relied on notes of some kind. This would also explain the work of post-966 'Edgar A'.

Likewise, the standard of Latinity in the pre-966 'Edgar A' charters is high, but it is not spectacular. The range of his vocabulary was neither as broad nor as inventive as that of some of his predecessors (Table 32).

It is clear from this table that 'Edgar A' was quite conservative in his use of language and that he added comparatively little to the diplomatic vocabulary of the tenth century. It is worth noting, neverthe-

**Table 32 Unprecedented vocabulary in
'Edgar A' charters, 959–963^a**

Word	Notes
cromatibus	S 683; originally from Greek, <i>χρῶμις</i> (though certainly not in the first instance, here); used by Vitruvius, <i>De architectura</i> .
delectabilia	S 698, reasonably common word.
luculentissime	S 690, S 703; reasonably common word.
quadriformi	S 690, S 703; reasonably common word.
tantundem	S 690, S 703; rare word, used by Aldhelm, <i>Epistola ad Heahfridum</i> .
truiatim	S 709, S 717; reasonably common word.

^a Given that 'Edgar A' may not always have been responsible for writing the witness lists of his charters (as S 690 demonstrates), the vocabulary in this table has been drawn only from the main body of the charters, excluding the witness lists and the boundary clauses.

less, that the predilection for Graecisms and archaic terms typical of tenth-century Anglo-Latin also left its mark on 'Edgar A'. The word *tantundem* is particularly interesting; rare, though not unprecedented, in Anglo-Latin, it had a clear Aldhelmian pedigree.³⁴

Overall, then, the charters that 'Edgar A' produced are competent and, above all, consistent. Formulae did not vary much, new vocabulary was limited, and the overall structure of the charters, too, remained constant. The emphasis, it seems, now fell more on uniformity than on innovation.

Charters and the recreation of the past

The drive for uniformity visible in the charters of 'Edgar A', and amongst Edgar's charters more broadly, may be symptomatic of a broader trend. Like its continental and Mediterranean counterparts, Anglo-Saxon diplomatic quickly became an echo chamber within which a single formula could be copied, adapted, paraphrased and recycled by successive generations of draftsmen across decades or even centuries.³⁵ In the seventh and eighth centuries, local traditions

³⁴ See *Aldelmi opera*, p. 717.

³⁵ The way in which formulae were picked up and reused in Anglo-Saxon charters generally, and in those of the tenth and eleventh centuries in particular, certainly merits further investigation. In thinking of a diplomatic formula as a 'cultural unit', the theory of memetics, which is still in its infancy in the context of Medieval Studies, is likely to prove particularly fruitful. On the application of psychology and memetics to history generally, see Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, CA, 2008); on the use of memetics and cognitive science in a specifically medieval context, see Edward

had quickly appeared which, whilst they adhered to the fundamental structure of the charter quite strictly, established their own identities through the use of specific local formulae and procedures which endured from one document to the next. During the reigns of Alfred and Edward, local procedures were deliberately cross-bred to create a new 'national' language for Anglo-Saxon diplomatic which combined both Mercian and West Saxon procedures. New procedures were created, certainly, but underpinning this process was the recycling of certain formulae chosen carefully and deliberately from older charters (the reuse in Edward's charter, S 364, of the proem of the Breedon charter, S 197, is perhaps the best example).

In Æthelstan's reign, however, this tendency was much reduced. In the main, the models used by Æthelstan's draftsmen were literary rather than diplomatic. They drew at length on Aldhelm, of course; but, for most of his reign, not one of Æthelstan's draftsmen, including 'Æthelstan A', ever recycled a single formula from an older charter in a sanction or a proem. Everything they wrote was, in a diplomatic context, completely original. It was not until the latter 930s, at the very end of Æthelstan's reign, that any kind of recycling took place, when 'Æthelstan C', writing S 447 (939, Christ Church, Canterbury), repeated verbatim the proem of a charter that had been written nearly half a century earlier, during the reign of Æthelstan's father, Edward, and also appears to have drawn some vocabulary from the proem shared by S 197 (848, Peterborough, *ex* Breedon-on-the-Hill) and S 364 (901, Wilton) (Table 33).

Whatever the reason for this sudden return to the past, it was a trend that did not go away. Over the next two decades, Anglo-Saxon charter draftsmen copied formulae from older charters with increasing frequency. Unsurprisingly, the stylistic masterpieces of Æthelstan's chancery provided rich pickings for the draftsmen of the 940s, 950s and 960s, but they also looked further afield. However, older charter formulae were not selected at random. Instead, draftsmen working for Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig tended, almost exclusively, to draw their formulae from a very specific set of diplomas: S 197/S 364; S 346, a charter of 889 in Alfred's name, which was written in a style of Latin which was conspicuously advanced for its time, and which was preserved at Worcester; and a series of charters issued during the reign of Edward 'the Elder' which paraphrased the Nicene Creed (Tables 34–36).

Arthur Mullins, 'Using Cognitive Science to Think about the Twelfth Century: Revisiting the Individual through Latin Texts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2010); for application of memetics to Anglo-Saxon England, in particular, see Drout, *How Tradition Works*.

Table 33 Æthelstan

Formula in earlier charters	Formula in Æthelstan's charters
S 359 (900, Old Minster, Winchester)	S 447 (939, Christ Church, Canterbury) ^a
Regnante imperpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo, et omnia de summo celi apice visibilia et inuisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante presentisque uite semper curriculo cotidie decrescente	Regnante inperpetuum Domino nostro Iesu Christo omnia de summo cæli apice uisibilia et inuisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante presentisque uitæ semper curriculo cotidie decrescente ac nobis mortalibus temporalia gaza necnon et lucra possessionum inaniter fruentibus facescunt ac defluunt
S 197 (848, Peterborough, <i>ex</i> Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901, Wilton)	
[...] sic mutando mortalis vitæ fragilitas fatescit [...] Ita universa divitiarum facultas et temporalis gazæ possessio [...]	

^a S 432 (937, Athelney) has a comparable formula in its proem: *omnia de summo caeli apice visibilia et invisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante* [etc.].

Table 34 Edmund

Earlier charters	Charters of Edmund
S 359 (900, Old Minster, Winchester)	S 467 (940, Old Minster, Winchester)
Regnante imperpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo, et omnia de summo celi apice visibilia et inuisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante presentisque uite semper curriculo cotidie decrescente	In nomine altithroni qui omnia de summo cæli apice visibilia et invisibilia ordinabiliter gubernans atque moderans presentisque vitæ curriculo cotidie temporalis gaze possessiones et universe divitiarum facultates quas predecessorum anxia sollicitudo per indefessa laborum emolumenta lucratur et incertis heredibus interdum optatis interdum alienis relinquuntur. Sic mutando fragilitas mortalis vite marcescit; et rotunda seculorum volubilitas inanescit ac in carorum propinquorum amicorumque amissione conqueritur ac lacrimatur
S 197 (848, Peterborough, <i>ex</i> Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901, Wilton)	
[...] Status huius mundi in velocitate deficiet et rotunda sæculorum volubilitas facesset sic alternando creaturarum qualitas decrescit, sic mutando mortalis vitæ fragilitas fatescit [...] Ita universa divitiarum facultas et temporalis gazæ possessio quam præcessorum anxia sollicitudo per indefessa laborum emolumenta lucratur pro dolor incertis heredibus interdum optatis interdum exosis relinquitur [...]	

The Anglo-Saxon Chancery

S 197 (848, Peterborough, *ex*
Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901,
Wilton)

sic mutando **mortalis** vitæ fragilitas
fatescit [...] Ita universa divitiarum
facultas et **temporalis gazæ possessio**
[...]

S 374 (904, New Minster, Winchester)

Dispensante et gubernante Domino
nostro Iesu Christo incommutabiliter
omnia uisibilia et inuisibilia, quamuis
uerba regum et procerum decreta **uelut**
fundamenta montium ad modicum
fixa uideantur, **tamen plerumque**
tempestates et turbines secularium
rerum regnorum statuta pulsantes
quatiant

S 346 (889, Worcester)

Si qui vero ut non optamus serpentino
suggestionis **demonice** toxico inflati
huius tramitis seriem in aliquo
temptauerint foedere **noverint se cum**
Anna et Zaphira herebica aeternae
anathematis machera perforandos nisi
prius digna satisfactione emendare
maluerint

S 485 (942, Shaftesbury)

quia nobis **mortalibus temporalia**
gaza necnon et lucra **possessionum**
inaniter fruentibus **facescunt** ac
defluunt.

S 493 (944, Wilton)^a

In nomine Dei summi et altissimi
Jhesu Christi. Quamvis decreta
pontificum et verba sacerdotum
velud fundamenta montium
indistrictis ligaminibus **fixa** sunt.
Tamen plerumque tempestates et
turbines secularium rerum etiam
religio sancte Dei ecclesie maculis
reproborum dissipabitur hac
rumpitur [...]

S 471 (943, Abingdon)^b

Sic **demonice** fermentationis stimulo
incedens nostrum integrum et
inuolatum donum fraudulenter
infringere probauerit, **nouerit** se
proculdubio **cum Anna et Saphira**
satellitibusque **eorum herebica eterni**
anatematis macera perforandum,
nisi prius digna satisfaccione
emendare uoluerit

^a Also used in S 497 (944, Christ Church, Canterbury), S 501 (944, St Augustine's, Canterbury) and S 506 (945, Selsey).

^b Also used in S 486 (943, Old Minster, Winchester), S 487 (943, Old Minster, Winchester), S 489 (943, Christ Church, Canterbury), S 492 (943, Wilton) and S 496 (942/4, Abingdon).

These charters represent only a quite small percentage of all the documents produced during the reigns of Edmund, Eadred and Eadwig. Nevertheless, the consistency with which they recycled formulae drawn from the same set of older charters, all of which were issued during the reigns of Alfred or Edward, is striking. It is highly unlikely that these older charters were always consulted first hand. More probably, a formulary had been compiled which incorporated the formulae from these charters and was present at the court, where its examples could be easily copied.

During Edgar's reign, the use of older charter formulae continued. Moreover, Edgar's draftsmen broadened their repertoire of quite significantly. As well as making use of phraseology from Edward's and Alfred's charters, they went right back to the ninth and even the

Table 35 Eadred

Earlier charters	Charters of Eadred
S 197 (Peterborough, <i>ex</i> Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901, Wilton)	S 522a (Barking, 947)
In nomine almi agyæ sophiæ. Qui monarchiam mundi totius ac celsitudinem cælorum abditamque profunditatem turgentis oceani in altis et in imis omnia cum suo maiestatis imperio. Qui in primordio mundi creavit et nunc in ævum gubernat et regit summus pater omnipotens Deus. Status huius mundi in velocitate deficit et rotunda sæculorum volubilitas facesset sic alternando creaturarum qualitas decrescit sic mutando mortalis vitæ fragilitas fatescit De qua miserrima humani status vicissitudine Æcclesiastes cælesti afflatus spiritu competentem protulit sententiam 'Generatio' inquit 'venit et generatio vadit' 'alii nascuntur et alii moriuntur' [...]	In nomine almi et agie sophiea qui monarchiam mundi totius ac celsitudinem celorum abditamque profunditatem turgentis oceanic in altis et in imis omnia cum sue maiestatis imperio nunc et in euum gubernat. Status namque huius mundi in uelocitate deficit et rotunda seculorum uolubilitas facessetd sic alternando creaturarum qualitas decrescit sic mutando mortalis uite fragilitas fatescit de qua miserrima humani status uicissitudine ecclesiastes celesti afflatus spiritu competentem protulit sententiam. 'Generatio' inquit 'uenit et generatio uadit'. 'Alii nascuntur et alii moriuntur'.
S 374 (904, New Minster, Winchester)	S 525 (947, Abingdon) ^a
Dispensante et gubernante Domino nostro Iesu Christo incommutabiliter omnia uisibilia et inuisibilia, quamuis uerba regum et procerum decreta uelut fundamenta montium ad modicum fixa uideantur, tamen plerumque tempestates et turbines secularium rerum regnorum statuta pulsantes quatiunt.	In nomine sancte trinitatis. Quamuis decreta pontificum et uerba sacerdotum uelut fundamenta montium indistrictis ligaminibus fixa sint, tamen plerumque tempestates et turbines secularium rerum etiam religio sancte Dei ecclesie maculis reproborum dissipabitur ac rumpitu [...]
S 197 (Peterborough, <i>ex</i> Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901, Wilton)	S 532 (948, Old Minster, Winchester) ^b
In nomine almi agyæ sophiæ. Qui monarchiam mundi totius ac celsitudinem cælorum abditamque profunditatem turgentis oceani in altis et in imis omnia cum suo maiestatis imperio. Qui in primordio mundi creavit et nunc in ævum gubernat et regit summus pater omnipotens Deus. [...]	In nomine almi et agye sophyæ. Qui monarchiam mundi totius ac celsitudinem cælorum abditamque profunditatem turgentis oceani in altis et in unis. Omnia cum suæ maiestatis imperio nunc et in evum gubernat ceu pupillarum obtutus per triquadrum mundum cotidie cernitur ac manifestata signa declarantur quomodo transeuntis mundi vicissitudo diuturnis horis crescendo decrescit et ampliando minuatur. Tamen superno fulti adminiculo prosequi indigemus ad alta cujus scilicet fervoris igne.

S 197 (Peterborough, *ex* Breedon-on-the-Hill), and S 364 (901, Wilton)

In nomine almi agyæ sophiæ. **Qui monarchiam mundi tocius ac celsitudinem cælorum abditamque profunditatem** turgentis oceani in altis et in imis omnia **cum suo majestatis imperio**. Qui in primordio mundi creavit et **nunc in ævum gubernat** et regit summus pater omnipotens Deus

S 346 (889, Worcester)

Si qui vero ut non optamus serpentino suggestionis demonice toxico inflati huius tramitis seriem in aliquo temptaverint foedare noverint se cum Anna et Zaphira herebica æterne anathematis machera perforandos nisi prius digna satisfactione emendare maluerint

S 541 (948, Glastonbury)

In nomine Dei summi et altissimi Jhesu Christi. Agonista sancte predicationis ortator talem protulit sententiam dicens: 'omnia nuda et aperta sunt coram oculis Dei' et a luce prima usque conticinium uniuscujusque actus prospicit **qui monarchiam tocius mundi ac celsitudinem celorum abditamque profunditatem cum sue majestatis imperio nunc et in evum gubernat**

S 547 (948, Old Minster, Winchester)

Si qui vero prout non optamus serpentino suggestionis demonice toxico inflati huius tramitis seriem in aliquo temptaverint foedare, noverint se cum Anna et Zafirra satellitibusque herebica æterne anathematis macera perforandos nisi prius digna satisfactione emendare maluerint

^a Also used in S 528 (947, Christ Church, Canterbury).

^b Also used in S 533 (948, Peterborough).

eighth centuries for their models, reproducing formulae which, in some cases, had been out of use for more than a century (Table 37).

To a great extent, the same formulae that had been in use during the 940s and 950s remained current during Edgar's reign. However, they were augmented in several interesting ways. To begin with, S 193 (840, Worcester, *ex* Breedon-on-the-Hill), the sibling of S 197, seems to have contributed some vocabulary to S 737 (966, Abingdon). The words *zabaoth*, *sagax sophista*, *ianitor caelestis bibliotece* and *katolectico versu cecinit*, which were all used in S 737, had also been used in S 193. Unlike S 197, however, the proem of S 193 had not, as far as it is possible to tell, been recycled in a later charter. It is also interesting that the proem of S 217 (itself a recycled form of a proem used in three West Saxon charters from the mid-ninth century) was used in Edgar's charters. Just as S 193 was related to S 197, S 217 (887, Worcester) was the forerunner of S 346 (889, Worcester), which had itself been used as a stylistic model in the charters of Edmund and Eadred. It may be the case, then, that a conscious attempt was being made during Edgar's reign to incorporate more formulae from a wider range of

Table 36 Eadwig

Earlier charters	Charters of Eadwig
S 197 (Peterborough, <i>ex</i> Breedon-on-the-Hill) and S 364 (901, Wilton) [...] Status huius mundi in velocitate deficiet et rotunda sæculorum volubilitas facesset sic mutando mortalis vitæ fragilitas fatescit [...]	S 649 (Old Minster, Winchester, 957) Nunc mutando fragilitas mortalis vitæ marcescit et rotunda seculorum volubilitas inanescit [...]
S 359 (900, Old Minster, Winchester) Regnante inperpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo, et omnia de summo celi apice visibilia et inuisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante presentisque uite semper curriculo cotidie decrescente	S 657 (958, Abingdon) Regnante inperpetuum Domino nostro Iesu Christo omnium uisibilium et inuisibilium creatore inperpetuum regnante et a summo celi fastigio omnia regnorum iura disponente. Cunctis ea que sunt uera cernentibus manifestum est quod presentis uite prosperitas mundi strepitu deficiendo corrumpitur. Nunc igitur de rebus temporalibus si bene dispensentur eterna iusticia comparatur.

Table 37 Edgar

Earlier charters	Charters of Edgar
S 374 (904, New Minster, Winchester) Quamuis uerba regum et procerum decreta uelut fundamenta montium ad modicum fixa uideantur, tamen plerumque tempestates et turbines secularium rerum regnorum statuta pulsantes quatiunt. Quapropter litterarum memorie commendare procuraui ego Edward rex Anglorum	S 687 (960, Abingdon) Quamuis enim regalium dignitatum decreta et saluberrima regnorum consilia manente immunitatis singrafa iugiter fixa firmaque perseuerent adtamen quia non umquam tempestates et mundi turbines fragilem uite cursum humane pulsantes contra diuina supernæ affirmationis ac legitima iura illidunt. Idcirco ordine litterarum ac cartarum scedulis sunt roboranda ne fortuitu casu successorum progenies posterorum ignorato precedentium patrum cirographo inextricabilem horrendorum barathrorum uoraginem incurrat

S 300 (850, St Augustine's, Canterbury), S 301 (850, Malmesbury), S 326 (860, Shaftesbury), and S 217 (887, Worcester)

Regnante imperpetuum Deo et Domino Iesu Christo, **cum** cuius imperio hic labentis seculi prosperitas in aduersis successoribus sedulo permixta et conturbata cernuntur et omnia uisibilia atque desiderabilia ornamenta huius mundi ab ipsis amatoribus cotidie transeunt. Ideo beati quique ac sapientes cum hiis fugitiuis seculi diuiciis eterna et iugiter permansura gaudia celestis patrie magno opere adipisci properant

S 359 (900, Old Minster, Winchester)

Regnante imperpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo. Et omnia de summo celi apice visibilia et inuisibilia ordinabiliter gubernante presentisque uite semper curriculo cotidie decrescente

S 248 (705/6, Glastonbury)

In nomine Domini Dei nostri Iesu Christi saluatoris, ea quæ secundum decreta canonum tractata fuerint, licet sermo tantum ad testimonium sufficeret, tamen pro incerta futuri temporis fortuna cirographorum sedulis sunt roboranda

S 292 (842, Glastonbury)

Si autem aliquis diabolica fraude deceptus et seculari **cupiditate** inlectus istud inmutare vel **irritum facere** conauerit **sciat se** anathematizatum ab omnibus fidelibus hic et in futuro et in die iudicii coram Christo et angelis ejus nisi ante emendaverit **rationem redditurum** esse

S 698 (961, Abingdon)

In summi tonantis onomate, **cum** cuius his transeuntis mundi felicitas in aduersis successionibus sedulo permixta et conturbata perspicitur et uniuersa uisibilia atque delectabilia ornamenta huius cosmi cotidie ab ipsis amatoribus transeunt, et idcirco felices quique ac sapientes cum his transitoriis mundi diuiciis iugiter mansura gaudia adipisci

S 691 (961, Abingdon)

Regnante imperpetuum Domino nostro Iesu Christo omnium uisibilium et inuisibilium rerum creatore imperpetuum regnante et a summo celi fastigio omnia regnorum iura disponente. Cunctis ea que sunt uera cernentibus manifestum est quod **presentis uite** prosperitas mundi strepitu deficiendo corrumpitur. Nunc igitur de rebus temporalibus si bene dispensentur eterna iusticia comparatur

S 713 (963, Abingdon)

In nomine domini nostri Jhesu Christi Salvatoris ea quæ secundum decreta canonum tractata fuerint licet sermo tantum ad testimonium sufficeret tamen pro incerta futuri temporis fortuna cyrographorum scedulis sunt roboranda

Siquis uero **cupiditate inlectus** temptauerit **inritam facere** aut frangere huius decreti diffinitionem, **sciat se** in tremendo examine **rationem redditurum**

S 221 (901, Much Wenlock)

Regnante rege reguum qui in tribus personis sue sanctæ divinitatis consistit qui angelos necnon et animas cælum terramque sine materia creavit

S 197 (848, Peterborough, *ex* Breedon-on-the-Hill) and S 364 (901, Wilton)

Ita **universa** divitiarum **facultas et temporalis gazæ possessio** quam præcessorum anxia sollicitudo per indefessa laborum emolumenta **lucratur pro** dolor incertis heredibus interdum optatis interdum exosis relinquitur. Quemadmodum psalmista inprovidam humani generis socordiam conquerens increpitet: 'Thesaurizat et ignorat cui congregat ea'. Ideo sunt omnes nostras serie et sermocinationis litterarum apicibus confirmandos ne unquam ullo oblivione tradantur sed perpetua memoria servantur. Quicquid reges ac præcedentes patres firmiter constituerunt

S 197 (848, Peterborough, *ex* Breedon-on-the-Hill) and S 364 (901, Wilton)

et rotunda sæculorum volubilitas facesset sic alternando creaturarum qualitas decrescit sic **mutando mortalis vitæ fragilitas fatescit**

S 723 (963, Old Minster, Winchester)

Regnante rege regum qui in tribus personis suæ sanctæ divinitatis consistit qui angelos necnon et animas cælum terramque sine materia creavit

S 737 (966, Abingdon)^a

Regnante zabaoth inperpetuum Domino nostro Iesu Christo. **Uniuersa** scilicet diuitiarum **facultas et temporalis gaze possessio** que predecessorum anxie sollicitudo per indefessa laborum emulamenta **lucratur, pro** dolor incertis heredibus, interdum optatis, sepe exosis derelinquitur. Quem ad modum psalmigraphus inprovidiam humani generis socordiam conquerens, increpat, 'Thesaurizat et ignorat cui congregat ea', necnon sagax diuini sermonis sophista celestique bibliotece ianitor metrica facundia fretus catalectico cecinit uersu

S 789 (972, Wilton)

Nunc **mutando fragilitas mortalis vite marcescit et rotunda seculorum volubilitas manescit** ac in carorum propinquorum amicorumque amissione conqueritur ac defletur

^a This charter also contains vocabulary which may have been drawn from S 193. See below.

older charters than had previously been the case, and that draftsmen were broadening their search for stylistic models to copy.

The recycling in S 723 of the proem of S 221, a charter in the name of Æthelred and Æthelflæd in favour of Much Wenlock, points very much in the same direction. S 221 was written in competent, though not spectacular Latin. Its significance to the draftsman of S 723, however, may have had more to do with its provenance rather than its language. S 723 is one of a small group of single sheets written by

an individual who may well have been a Mercian.³⁶ Perhaps, then, rather than following the prevailing trend and looking back to the charters of the West Saxon kings, this Mercian may have wanted to make a statement about Mercian identity by referring instead to those of Æthelred and Æthelflæd.

To summarise: almost none of Æthelstan's charters contain in their proems or sanctions formulae drawn from older charters. Not until the very end of his reign was an older formula, from a charter of Edward 'the Elder' recycled. The tendency to recycle older formulae then became more common during the reigns of Edmund and Eadred. It happened less frequently during Eadwig's reign, but increased again during Edgar's, when a broader range of formulae from a greater number of older charters were reproduced by different agencies at different times. In the main, these formulae were probably drawn from a formulary; in a few cases during Edgar's reign, however, original documents may have been examined and copied directly.

The obvious question, then, is why this should have been the case. Why, when Anglo-Saxon diplomatic had become so stylistically advanced during Æthelstan's reign, should the charters of Alfred and Edward, and of the ninth century more generally, have been seen as appealing models for copying? Why did Eadwig's draftsmen copy fewer older formulae? And why did Edgar's copy more?

It is not likely that this was an accidental, let alone a random process. The range of charters used as models is too narrow, and their formulae are reused too consistently. Instead, it seems as though somebody was deliberately targeting the charters of Edward and Alfred and, to differing degrees, feeding their language back into contemporary diplomatic practice. Perhaps the most obvious reason for doing this was to create a sense of consistency and coherence within Anglo-Saxon diplomatic in order to demonstrate explicitly that the charters of Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig and Edgar were very much a part of the same tradition as those that had been produced under the auspices of their predecessors. Inevitably, different draftsmen had their own formulae and vocabulary, and the way in which Anglo-Saxon diplomatic evolved over the course of the tenth century was certainly driven to a considerable extent by the comings and goings at the royal court. Sometimes, as was the case with 'Æthelstan C', the same person worked for more than one king, and so consistency was ensured that way. However, whilst there was probably a degree of continuity amongst the staff of the royal writing office throughout the tenth century, it is inevitable that new personnel would have to be introduced from time to time. In the 950s, when there was so

³⁶ Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 69–70 n. 137; Simon Keynes, *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, BACS Supplement 1 (London, 1991), p. 12; and Hart, *Danelaw*, p. 451.

much factionalism at the court, the staff turnover was probably quite high. There was a danger, therefore, that the kings' charters would, as time went on, look increasingly different as different draftsmen deployed their own vocabularies and developed their own formulae. There is no question that innovation was desirable at this time, and that it was even encouraged.³⁷ Yet, if any sense of dynastic continuity was to be achieved, if Edmund and Eadred were to broadcast the powerful message that they were members of the same dynasty as Alfred, then a certain degree of continuity was probably desirable in terms of how they expressed themselves when they communicated with their subjects. By recycling the language and phraseology of the past, the charters of the 940s, 950s and 960s projected a powerful sense of coherence, which was very probably part of a broader, long-term attempt by the West Saxon dynasty to create a lucid cogent identity which could be passed from one king to the next.³⁸ Draftsmen would have been made aware of the bloodline of the documents they were producing; perhaps more importantly, the audience of those charters would have been reminded of the relationship between the charters of Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig and Edgar, and those of Alfred and Edward, which would have served as a clear reminder of the origins of the current king's power. This would have been especially effective if the original charter, from which a given phrase had originally been drawn, remained available at the house to which the new charter was dispatched.

The achievement and maintenance of sense of diplomatic coherence, however, may have been only one part of what was going on here. Throughout their history, the Anglo-Saxons had always possessed what one commentator has described as a 'backward-looking tendency'.³⁹ The culture of the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age' of the seventh and eighth centuries, in particular, fascinated them, and it was to this period that both Alfred and Æthelstan looked for guidance. So, in the 960s and 970s, did Æthelwold. In almost every text he wrote, Æthelwold sought in some way to harness the unassailable authority of the Anglo-Saxon past in seeking to justify the activities and aims of the reformers to a sometimes sceptical public.⁴⁰ In 'King Edgar's Establishment of the

³⁷ For instance, David Dumville has shown how, with each new king, a new style of writing was developed: 'English Square Minuscule Script: The Mid-Century Phases',.

³⁸ David Dumville made an engaging case for the 'continuation of royal policy from Alfred's day into the reform period of the 960s' (p. 204) in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, pp. 185–205.

³⁹ Gransden, 'Traditionalism and Continuity during the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism', p. 32.

⁴⁰ Several very engaging articles have discussed this retrospective tendency within the reform: see Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 185–205; Coates, 'Perceptions of the Anglo-Saxon Past in the Tenth-Century Monastic Reform Movement'; and Joyce Hill, *Bede and the Benedictine Reform*, The Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1998).

Monasteries', Æthelwold emphasised the example set by *þe on æran timan lifes weron* [...] *7 heora dæda gefyrn tocnæowan* ('those who had lived in former times [...] and knew their deeds of old').⁴¹ In *Regularis concordia*, Æthelwold paraphrased Bede when describing the actions that Edgar (and he) had taken against the secular clerics at Winchester: *eiectisque neglegentium clericorum spurcitiis* ('he drove out the clerics with their abominations').⁴² Indeed, Æthelwold often quoted Bede's work and, more frequently, made extensive use of Aldhelm's.⁴³ Æthelwold's relationship with the past went beyond the odd paraphrase here and there, however. As well as explicitly acknowledging the importance of the past and quoting the work of Aldhelm and Bede, Æthelwold (like 'Æthelstan A' and his successors) borrowed vocabulary and stylistic techniques from Aldhelm. Even when writing Old English, he seems to have made significant use of the technique of hyperbaton which was so typical of Aldhelm's work.⁴⁴ There is little doubt that, having understood the power of the Anglo-Saxon past as a persuasive tool, Æthelwold did everything he could to associate himself with it. The reform was not universally popular;⁴⁵ the past probably was, and had been since Alfred's day. By associating himself and his agenda with the Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age', Æthelwold presented a compelling argument in support of even his more controversial aims.

Charter draftsmen cannot have been immune from this general interest in the past. After all, it was charter draftsmen who had kept the vibrant intellectual culture of the 'Golden Age' alive in the ninth century, and who had resurrected it so spectacularly in the 920s and 930s. In the ninth century, they had copied Aldhelm in order to make the documents they wrote appear more intellectually imposing. In the 920s and 930s, Æthelstan's draftsmen did something broadly similar, but on a much more impressive scale. Throughout the tenth century, literary and diplomatic forms of Latin were divided, if they were divided at all, by only the most porous of barriers, through which

⁴¹ 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries', ed. Whitelock, Brett and Brooke, in *Councils and Synods*, p. 146.

⁴² *Regularis Concordia*, ed and trans Symons, p. 2. On the comparison with Bede, see Gransden, 'Traditionalism and Continuity', p. 40.

⁴³ Æthelwold's understanding of Aldhelm was profound: see Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', pp. 187–95; and Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, pp. 125–31.

⁴⁴ Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, pp. 127–8.

⁴⁵ Following Edgar's death, there was a violent reaction against reformed monasticism. Lands which had been granted to the reformed monasteries seem, on quite a large scale, to have been seized by secular interests. See D. J. V. Fisher, 'The Anti-Monastic Reaction in the Reign of Edward the Martyr', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (1950–52): 254–70; and Shashi Jayakumar, 'Reform and Retribution: The "Anti-Monastic Reaction" in the Reign of Edward the Martyr', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), pp. 337–52.

trends, styles and techniques were wont to percolate with ease. There is no doubt whatever that the highly educated draftsmen in charge of writing the kings' charters at this time would have been aware of contemporary literary trends.

It is possible, then, that the draftsmen of the third quarter of the tenth century, perceiving the importance of the past in contemporary culture, looked back to their own heritage. Short, business-like and technical, the charters of the 'Golden Age' of the seventh and eighth centuries had little to recommend them stylistically. But S 197 and S 346 were much more in step with the literary tastes of the tenth century; with their Aldhelmian style, Graecisms, archaisms and lines of verse, they compare favourably with anything written in the 900s. Indeed, to a great extent, their Latin prefigured the 'hermeneutic' style that was so important to the reformers. It is possible that, at a time when the past was distinctly *en vogue*, when the most powerful churchmen in the kingdom were adopting 'hermeneutic' Latin in order to set themselves apart and broadcast their learnedness, the humble draftsmen in attendance on the king, in their own subtle way, were trying to say: 'that's all very well; but, by the way, we did it first.' It may also be the case that, denied the opportunity of writing original 'hermeneutic' Latin by a pro-reform party who jealously guarded the style as a means of promoting their own exclusive identity, charter draftsmen were compelled to recycle rather than to innovate when they wanted to elevate the style of their Latin. Whatever the reason for it, there is no doubt that the draftsmen of the 940s, 950s and 960s were taking a keen, perhaps even an academic interest in the work of their forebears. Thus, it seems fair to say that tenth-century Anglo-Saxon diplomatic had come full circle.

Conclusion

For the monastic reformers, the coalescence of Church and state was a crucial aim. The New Minster Refoundation Charter, 'King Edgar's Establishment of the Monasteries' and *Regularis concordia* all, in their own ways, attempt to illustrate the benefits of religious-political unity. It makes absolutely no sense, when set against this context, that any of the functions of government, let alone charter production, should have been distanced in any way from the royal court, even when they were placed in the hands of leading ecclesiastics. The likes of Cenwald, Dunstan and 'Edgar A', whoever he was, were able to take responsibility for the production of royal charters precisely because of their closeness to the king, not because of their distance (either geographical or figurative) from him. Accordingly, it might be argued that the charters of Edgar's reign preserve some of the most compelling

evidence for the existence and function of a coherent, organised and carefully administered writing office. Whilst the extraneous material they contained in their proems and sanctions varied a great deal, in their political and legal protocols, they preserve a remarkably consistent tradition. Whoever was writing them, whether he was contemplating the sun setting over the Thames in Abingdon, gazing through the fog at Glastonbury Tor, staring at the muddy Exe, or simply shivering in some draughty cloister whilst the king and his court partied into the small hours in a nearby hall, dated his text, wrote his boundary clause and, most importantly of all, presented the office of the king in broadly the same way. That such a level of standardisation could be exercised so effectively is impressive evidence of the sophistication of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy in the third quarter of the tenth century. Moreover, it stands as a powerful testimony to the ability of the king to express himself to his subjects and to posterity in terms which he likely understood.

The renewed interest in the past visible in Edgar's charters would seem to strengthen this position. Although the recycling of older formulae was not exactly frequent, it happened often enough in Edgar's charters to give the distinct impression that it was being carried out as part of a coherent programme. Undoubtedly, formulae from the charters of kings who had ruled decades previously were being fed back into the diplomatic language of the tenth century, probably in order to create a sense of dynastic consistency in the charters of Æthelstan's successors. Perhaps this process was a conscious parallel to the retrospective dynamic that was apparent in much contemporary literature; perhaps it was even the draftsmen's way of reminding the great Latinists of the age that their own predecessors had been writing 'hermeneutic' Latin for more than a century.

Above all, the repeated recycling of formulae from older documents is yet another aspect of the broad consistency of Edgar's charters. These charters were being written by different individuals at different times, certainly, each of whom had his stylistic idiosyncrasies; but each of these individuals was also working for the king and so adhered closely to a consistent set of procedures. Eloquent, compelling and erudite, Edgar's charters were designed to record and project the will of a powerful, literate and ambitious king who was mindful of the history of his dynasty but optimistic about its future. In the reign of his eventual successor, his optimism, sadly, would prove ill-founded.

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the Anglo-Saxon charter has always lain in its ability to torment both historians and critics of literature in equal measure with its strange style, curious claims and unusual appearance. At almost every moment in Anglo-Saxon history, the charter is there in the background not simply recording grants of land but also leading all kinds of folk, from the king to the royal dish-bearer, blinking into the historical light. Yet, it cannot do so quietly: for almost every 'unremarkable' Anglo-Saxon charter, there is usually another, not so very far away, screaming out for attention. In the seventh century, when charters were first brought into service in England, the scribes who wrote them used an imposing, uncial script. On the face of it, this was a very odd habit: a fast, cursive script would have been much more fitting, not to mention more economical, for a charter. Yet, when set in context, the use of uncial makes perfect sense. In a society in which literacy was probably very rare, it was unlikely that many people would have been able to read the Latin of the early Anglo-Saxon charters. By using uncial script, therefore, their scribes made these documents resemble high-value gospel books and thus ensured that they would absorb some of their unshakeable, numinous authority. Just by looking at one of these early charters, there could be no doubt that it was an important text which demanded respect. Whether or not they were aware of it, these scribes were doing something quite exceptional which set their diplomatic tradition apart somewhat from its continental counterparts. Anglo-Saxon charter scribes never lost that sense of individuality, and the texts they wrote are much the better for it. By the tenth century, the imposing, literary Latin in which they wrote was every bit as incongruous as the uncial script of the seventh century. Yet, it was used to achieve fundamentally the same thing: namely, to remind the reader of the religious and (in the tenth century, at any rate) secular authority of the charter.

On account of the literary ambitions of its draftsmen, the Anglo-Saxon charter found itself living a curious double life. On the one hand, in the proems and sanctions, exuberant religious imagery and complex metaphors ran wild as one draftsman after another sought to moralise and condemn in ever more lurid terms. On the other, however, at no point in its history did the Anglo-Saxon charter ever fail to perform its basic legal function. Even the most high-spirited draftsman returned,

perhaps a little sulkily, to writing straightforward legal prose when it came to the dating clauses and witness lists. The king's royal style afforded a little scope for invention now and again but, at the same time, was treated with considerable reverence in the tenth century, and was rarely meddled with too much.

This approach gave rise to a diplomatic corpus which is, by the standards of its continental and Mediterranean equivalents, wildly diverse. It can seem, at first sight, that one charter has almost nothing in common with another issued by the same king in the same year (and perhaps even written by the same draftsman). The lengths of their witness lists, the complexity and tone of their language, and even their script (if they survive as single sheets) can all vary significantly. It makes for a collection of texts which is endlessly fascinating, within which the historian can sense something meaningful about the identities, interests, ambitions and backgrounds of the individual draftsmen. However, the critic's delight is offset by the diplomaticist's frustration. In a corpus this diverse, in which there were so few rules and consistent procedures, even establishing something as straightforward as authenticity is an inexact science. Indeed, in approaching the Anglo-Saxon diplomatic corpus, one must dispense altogether with thoughts of inviolable rules, chancery archetypes, absolutes and 'ur-texts'. There were none. It was every draftsman for himself.

Or, at least, it was up to a point. In order to appreciate the essential consistency of the Anglo-Saxon diplomatic tradition, it is necessary to 'zoom out' a little, and to see the bigger picture. In the tenth century, the words of the kings' charters changed regularly; their formulae varied, with new ones being created apparently at will, and old ones resurrected from charters which ought long since to have been safely buried beyond reach in the depths of some provincial reliquary. One aspect of the charter that did not change, however, was its basic structure, which gave it validity as a legal document. Tenth-century charters all had witness lists; the vast majority had dating clauses which tended to use the incarnation; they had dispositive sections which laid out the terms of the grant; and they had boundary clauses which were almost always in the vernacular. How a scribe wrote a charter could change, but the basic template was remarkably inflexible. Even the more unconventional charters, such as those produced along the lines of the 'Dunstan B' model, still contained most of these basic features.

Arguably, though, the most consistent aspect of the Anglo-Saxon charter in the tenth century was its utility as a powerful tool of royal propaganda. From at least Alfred's time, and probably from long before that, it had been understood by England's political elite that charters represented a highly valued, durable form of communication, the texts of which could be guaranteed to reach the eyes and ears of the kingdom's top brass, both secular and religious. Thus, they

became a means of royal 'image management'. If the king wanted to be *rex Anglorum*, or *basileus*, or *rector et gubernator totius Albionis*, or anything else for that matter, then it was via his charters that he was going to bring it to the attention of the people who needed to know. Every king from Alfred onwards used charters in this way. Every king from Alfred onwards, therefore, must have had some means of ensuring that charters said what he wanted them to say. Probably, a willing bishop was pressed into service as a kind of 'chancellor'. This was, in all likelihood, the role that Cenwald and Dunstan performed in the middle years of the tenth century, and the role that Ælfwine had performed before that (and it seems unlikely that he was the first). This individual need not always have written the king's charters personally. Rather, it is much more probable that this 'chancellor' created an archetype to which the scribes under his instruction had to adhere more or less strictly. Latterly, several different individuals could assume this role over the course of a single year, presiding simultaneously over the production of the king's charters. For some, this may suggest a certain level of administrative inconsistency at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon state. For others, though, it may indicate a very high level of flexibility and sophistication. It is fun to speculate, moreover, as to what role the king himself might have had. Most, perhaps all, kings after Alfred were probably literate. It is possible, therefore, that some may have had a degree of personal input into the way they were presented in their charters. The thought that Æthelstan and 'Æthelstan A' might have sat down together over a cup or two of mead to thrash out some new and fiendish sanction is an oddly pleasing one.

At any rate, it is absolutely clear that there can no longer be any serious argument over the existence of an Anglo-Saxon chancery in the tenth century. The evidence is as overwhelming as it is emphatic. At the end of the ninth century, West Saxon administrative efficiency combined with Mercian finesse in an agency capable of effectively producing royal diplomas in the king's name, written in the highest standards of Latin, regardless of where in the kingdom the court happened to be at the time or to whom the king saw fit to grant land. That agency was almost certainly ecclesiastical in its training, but that hardly changes things. Between about 850 and 975, it is reasonable to presume, albeit with some occasional need for qualification, that it was common practice amongst West Saxon and English kings to employ a writing office of some kind, probably under the guidance of a prominent bishop or abbot, to produce their charters. Again and again, the same people wrote the king's charters. Many of them were remarkable authors in their own right.

Indeed, in amongst all the hyperbole, it is very easy indeed to forget that the real star of the show, when it came to charters, was not actually

the king, but the draftsman. Projecting messages about intellectualism and royal authority was all very well, but it would all have come to nothing if there had not been individuals at court whose levels of Latinity were truly stratospheric. The key to everything, of course, was Aldhelm. The Anglo-Saxons had always cultivated an interest in writing the most challenging, verbose, hyperbolic and sophisticated Latin they could. Aldhelm, Bede, Alcuin and their imitators indulged this interest in the seventh, eighth and early ninth centuries; the monastic reformers, particularly Æthelwold, resurrected it in the tenth (perhaps deliberately eclipsing diplomatic Latin with their own particular interpretation of the 'hermeneutic' style in the process). In between, the *joie de vivre* of Anglo-Saxon literature was kept alive in the work of charter draftsmen. The evidence of the charters they wrote demonstrates conclusively that an interest in the work of Aldhelm prevailed long before Æthelwold, and long before Alfred's reforms. The use of Aldhelm's work in the tenth century, or even in the ninth, does not in any way indicate any kind of 'renaissance' or 'revival' of Anglo-Saxon intellectualism; wherever and whenever there were Anglo-Saxons writing Latin, there was Aldhelm. He had never gone away. As soon as the production of original literary texts began to decline in the ninth century, charter scribes in Mercia simply filled the gap by feeding Aldhelm's work into their charters. Aldhelm, who was himself not averse to the odd quotation of a classical or late antique source, would likely have approved thoroughly. Indeed, as the language of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic ranged from the sophisticated to the pretentious to the downright odd, one is tempted to wonder, at times, whether Aldhelm was the only thing of which its authors were under the influence.

This is particularly true of 'Æthelstan A', whose flamboyant and bizarre language never ceases to surprise and infuriate. Yet, while he was its greatest practitioner, he was not the creator of this style; while there is no doubting the sophistication of his prose, or the influence that it continued to exert over the draftsmen of the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is important to recognise that behind him stood a long line of charter draftsmen who had, since at least the beginning of the ninth century, been experimenting with different ways of making their prose sound more intellectual. Some had been more successful than others: the authors of S 193 and S 197 would probably have found plenty of common ground with 'Æthelstan A', had they ever had a chance to meet; on the other hand, the Kentish draftsmen who crowbarred a selection of rather artlessly recycled Aldhelmisms into their prose in the late ninth century in the vain hope that it would distract the reader from their poor Latin would likely have found him rather baffling. What matters, though, is that all these draftsmen were trying to achieve fundamentally the same outcome. They were

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all trying to write charters which looked and sounded sophisticated, challenging and intellectual. 'Æthelstan A' was not doing anything new. He was just doing it better.

In the end (as the cynic may already have observed), there is much about the history of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic that must be based on conjectures, some firmer than others. There must have been Anglo-Saxon diplomatic formularies, but none survive. There must have been a 'chancellor', but there is no specific reference to one before the eleventh century (and the people charged with overseeing the production of the charters in the tenth century probably were not called *cancellarius* anyway). There must have been a single writing office attached to the king's court which was charged with producing written documents, including charters, pertaining to the government of the kingdom, but no contemporary author was thoughtful enough to mention it. As so often, we are left with a handful of best guesses, but with few incontrovertible 'facts'. Thus, Anglo-Saxon diplomatic is likely to remain a controversial field. Since John Mitchell Kemble's great *Codex* heralded the modern era of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic criticism, much ink has been spilt and many feuds have been waged over the history, language and production of Anglo-Saxon charters. At the end of the nineteenth century, W. H. Stevenson was fully aware, as I am now at the beginning of the twenty-first, of how contentious hammering one's colours to the mast in the field of Anglo-Saxon diplomatic criticism can be.¹ The last word should probably therefore go to 'Æthelstan A':

Si autem quod absit aliquis diabolico inflatus spiritu hanc meæ compositionis ac confirmationis breviculam infringere vel elidere temptaverit, sciat se novissima ac magna examinationis die stridula clangente archangeli salpice bustis sponte dehiscentibus somata jam rediviva relinquentibus elementis omnibus pavefactis cum Iuda proditore qui a satoris pio sato 'filius perditionis' dicitur æterna confusione edacibus ineffabilem tormentorum flammis periturum

If, however (may it not happen), somebody, bloated with a devilish attitude, should try to trespass against or to ignore this little statement of my composition and confirmation, let him know that, on the very last and mighty day of judgement, with the trumpet of the archangel blaring out its shrieking call, with the tombs bursting open of their own accord and being abandoned by the revived bodies, with all the elements trembling, he shall perish in eternal confusion alongside the traitor Judas, who is called 'the son of perdition' by the pious sower of seeds, amongst the devouring flames of unspeakable torments.

¹ See W. H. Stevenson, *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery*, The Sanders Lectures in Bibliography, Given in Cambridge, 1898, available online at www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk, p. 1.

Appendix I

S 193

S 193 was composed on Christmas Day 840 when the court of King Berhtwulf was at Tamworth. It survives in the archive of Worcester, in the *Liber Wigorniensis*. The following text is taken from Appendix 3 in Kelly, *Peterborough*.

Aio et alto domino Deo Zabaoth regnante in euum. Siquidem humani generis prosapio de primo patre et matre oriundus in hanc sæculum uenit et sic per longa uaga temporum spatium e diuersis nationibus derimuntur, ut ianitor caelestis bibliothecae et uas electionis predicator egregius apostolus Paulus dixit 'Preteriit enim figura huius mundi' quoniam in uelocitate dies et anni deficiunt et iterum sagax sophista 'qui quondam Solymis diues regnauit in aruis' katolectico uersu cecinit dicens 'non semper licet gaudere fugit hora qua jacemur'. Et ideo sunt omnes nostrę serię litterarum apicibus confirmandas ne posteris ex memoria labere possit quicquid facta præcedentium patrum ac regum firmiter statuerunt.

Qua de re ego Berhtwulf Domino disponente rex Merciorum, mihi et omnibus Mercis in aeternam elemosinam, donans donabo Eanmundo uenerabili abbati et eius familie on Breodune, cum licentia et testimonia obtinatum gentis Merciorum, hanc libertatis gratiam: id est ut sit liberatum et obsolutum illud monasterium in eternitatem ab illis incommodiis quam nos Saxonica lingua fæstingmen dicimus, Christo Domino teste et omnibus sanctis in celis, tamdiu fides catholica et baptismum Christi in Brittannia seruetur. Ob huius rei gratiam ipse uero supradictus Eanmund abbas et illius sancta congregatio Breodunensis monasterii dederunt mihi et omnibus Mercis regaliter perfruendum et possedendum, in famoso uico in Tomewordie: magnum discum argenteum valde bene operatum ac faleratum in magno pretio et .cxx. mancusas in auro puro. Similiter etiam decantauerunt duodecim vicibus .c. psalterios et .cxx. missas pro Berhtwulfum regem et pro illius caros amicos et pro omnem gentem Merciorum, ut eorum libertas firmior ac stabiliior permaneat in eorum et ut illius regis memoria et amicorum eius, qui hanc pietatem in elemosinam sempiternam omnibus Mercis ille congregatione on Breodune donauerat in eorum sacris orationibus iugiter permaneat usque in euum. Insuper in Dei omnipotentis nomine et novem ordinibus angelorum et omnium electorum Christi preceptum ponimus, ut nullus umquam regum uel principum aut

Appendix I

alicuius personis homo, magnis siue modicis, in aliquo tempore hanc prescriptam libertatis gratiam infringere ausus sit, sed semper stabilis et indiscussa firmiterque firmata ille congregatione on Breodune coram Deo et hominibus jugiter permaneat in euum.

Haec autem cartula caraxata est anno dominice incarnationis .dcccxli., indictione .iiii. in die natalis domini in celebre uico on Tomeworðie, his testibus consentientibus et signum crucis Christi scribentibus quorum subter nomina notata sunt.

+ Ego Berhtuulf largiflua Dei munificentia rex Merciorum hanc meam libertatis gratiam ac omnium Merciorum cum signo sanctæ crucis firmiter consignabo.

+ Ego Sæðryð regina consensi et subscripsi.

+ Ego Cyneferð episcopus consensi.

+ Ego Aldred episcopus consensi.

+ Ego Berehtred episcopus consensi.

+ Ego Heaberht episcopus consensi.

+ Ego Cuðuulf episcopus consensi.

+ Ego Eanmund abbas consensi.

+ Ego ȳihtred abbas consensi.

+ Ego Ceolred abbas consensi

Appendix II

S 346

S 346, which was written in 889 and preserved at Worcester, records a grant of land and commercial privileges in London. The text below is taken from BCS, but has been repunctuated.

Sedulo namque nonnullis et maxime per instantis vitæ turbidam discordiæ rabiem in hac decrepita finis mundialis canitiæ contingere solet quod simplicem memorialis præcordii oculum turbines obliviose obscenitatis quatientes reverberant; seu nebulæ neglegentiarum nubiferis deprivationum fuscationibus a recte possessionis jure radiantem justitiæ Phoebum obnubilant; quapropter necesse cuilibet homini est ut litteratoriis apicibus omnia atquisita seu possessa ob præsentium sive succedentium cantelam quæ a catholicis vel heroicis viris cujuslibet persone majoris minorisve potestatis Deo ejusque sanctis per celorum celsitudinem tradita sunt etiam testimonio et roboratione ipsorum firme rationis serie firmentur rectoque caraxantis stilo in scedulis notentur.

Anno igitur postquam almifica cælestini luminis gemma per agrum virginalis pudicitiae humano generi desiderabilis mistici spiraminis specimine enituit octingentesimo octuagesimo nono indictione . vii . cujus denique splendoris et gratiæ nobis jubare radiante ego Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum et Æðelred subregulus et patricius Merciorum cum testimonio et licentia seu consensu senatorum episcoporum seu ducum utriusque gentis pro revelatione facinorum nostrorum et pro acquirenda deifice remunerationis requiæ Uuærfriðo eximio Huicciorum antistiti ad æcclesiam Uueogernensem in Lundonia unam curtem que verbotenus adad antiquum petrosum ædificium id est æt Hwætundes stane a civibus appellatur a strata publica usque murum ejusdem civitatis.

Si qui vero ut non optamus serpentino suggestionis demonice toxico inflati huius tramitis seriem in aliquo temptaverint foedare noverint se cum Anna et Zaphira herebica aeternæ anathematis machera perforandos nisi prius digna satisfactione emendare maluerint.

Haec autem sunt nomina illorum qui huic nostre donationi testes et consentientes fuerunt et trophico sancte crucis vexillo roborantes propriis manibus subscripserunt.

+ Ego Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum hanc donationem confirmans signo crucis subscribo.

Appendix II

- + Ego Æþelred subregulus et patricius Merciorum hanc donationem signo crucis subscripsi.
- + Ego Æþelflæd consensi
- + Ego Uulfred episcopus consensi
- + Ego Alhard episcopus consensi
- + Ego Uuærfrid episcopus consensi
- + Ego Deneuulf episcopus consensi
- + Ego Uulfsige episcopus consensi

Appendix III

S 225

S 225 was composed in 915 (although the extant copy, which dates from the thirteenth century, records the date as 878) and preserved at Abingdon. The text below is drawn from Kelly, *Abingdon*.

Regnante Christo mediatore nostro, filio Dei et saluatore mundi, qui scepra regit et alta tociusque telluris orbem post opere et umbratione conceptioneque sancti spiritus ex sacratissimo prosiliens uirginis aluo, cuius imperio cuncta obtemperant celestia, tremuntque terrestria et formidant infernalía. Huius gloriosissime incarnationis anno .dcccclxxviii., ego Æþelfled, iuuante superna pietate et largiente clementia Christi gubernacula regens Merciorum, cum consilio episcoporum optimatumque meorum, dedi licentiam Eadrice meo ministro comparandi terram .x. manentium æt Fernbeorgen, sibi suisque heredibus perpetualiter possidendam. Terram quidem hanc ego Eadric placibili pecunia comparauí æt Wullufe, liberam ab omnibus tributis, notis uel ignotis, nisi expeditione et arcis construccione et singulare precium contra aliud. Terram uero hanc Offa rex Merciorum tradidit Bynnan, abauo Wullafi, et litteris consignauit. Casu quidem contigit anno eclypsi solis perdicio prioris libri. Nunc autem nostra licentia et confirmatione anticus prescribitur liber. Si causa alicuius rei inueniatur, igne cremetur. Karaxata est autem cartula huius donationis et confirmationis anno diuine incarnationis sicut supra inuenitur, et die .v. idus Septembris, in loco qui dicitur Weardburg. Hoc autem seruantibus prosperitas, uita, salus; minuentibus uero et frangentibus mors, pena et perdicio. Nomina uero huius confirmationis et testimonii hic infra nitescent.

- + Ego Æþelfled hanc meam licentiam confirmo signaculo sancte crucis.
- + Ego Ælfwyn episcopus consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Ælfwine episcopus consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Æþelhun episcopus consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Eadgar consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Ælfred episcopus consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Æþelferd dux consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Ælfred dux consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Æþelhun abbas consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Ecgberht abbas consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Cynað abbas consensi et subscripsi.

Appendix III

- + Ego Wihfred consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Berhsige consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Æpelnap consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Æpelward consensi et subscripsi.
- + Ego Ælfstan consensi et subscripsi.

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Rewriting Post-Conquest History, *Malasree Home*

More charters survive from Anglo-Saxon England than texts of any other type. In a society in which the ownership of land was fundamental to status, wealth and power, the charters which gifted and guaranteed landholdings were crucial not only as legal documents but also as instruments of political power. As responsibility for their production was increasingly centralised at the royal court in the ninth and tenth centuries, charters also became vehicles for royal and religious propaganda, reflecting the dynamic and creative culture of tenth-century England.

Through an analysis of the extraordinarily sophisticated Latin in which these documents were written, this book demonstrates the literary ambitions of their draughtsmen (who may certainly be considered as Anglo-Latin literary authors in their own right), and also sheds light on the political ideologies of Anglo-Saxon England's most powerful and enigmatic kings and churchmen. Most tantalising of all, perhaps, is the fact that the language of royal charters, which may preserve some of the very words uttered by the king, provides an unparalleled view of the mechanisms by which the developing kingdom of England was governed. Not only does it indicate the increasingly sophisticated bureaucracy of an administratively advanced state, but it also reveals an atmosphere of literary and cultural attainment, emanating directly from the king's court, as rich as any in the early medieval Insular world.

Ben Snook teaches History at the Godolphin and Latymer School, London. He is the author of several articles on Anglo-Saxon history and literature.

Cover image shows detail from S 416, a charter written by 'Athelstan A' in 931. © The British Library Board. London, British Library, Cotton Charters viii. 16.

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